



Guyana Democracy and Governance Assessment

Produced for USAID Democracy Center and USAID/Guyana

By Management Systems International

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Executive Summary¹

Guyana is a polity characterized by politicized racialization. This term captures the fundamental phenomenon whereby extant racial differences are exploited and emphasized for political gain. Though there are important countermanding forces, a chief danger for Guyana is that contemporary events become tomorrow's history; continued conflict laid over past injustice – perceived or real – creates a structural pattern of distrust that permeates the entire social system. We may assert today that racial tensions in Guyana are imposed by the political class. Over time, however, the success of such imposition tends to create much greater division and deeper societal cleavages.

The assessment framework identifies five variables considered by political scientists to describe the critical issues at stake in the process of democratic consolidation. These five variables and related summary findings are provided below.

Consensus

Consensus is basic agreement on the scope and content of the political arena. The essence of democracy is ordered competition. Consensus issues address the basic rules under which such competition takes place.

- In Guyana, all relevant political actors agree on the basics of state boundaries, citizenship attributes, and the notion that democracy is *the* legitimate means for contesting politics; however, consensus is elusive in many other important areas. One informant said, “We can’t even agree on what to disagree about,” capturing the quintessential absence of common ground among political actors.
- There are fundamental disagreements on the proper role of the state, the party, and the government – and a pronounced tendency to conflate all three in both discourse and practice. This leads the two main parties into constant battle over the appropriateness of various constitutional structures and arrangements. These battles occur in many different spheres, but an archetypal outline of standard argument continually recurs.
 - For example, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) complained bitterly about highly centralized and tightly controlled

¹ *This assessment attempts to be as clear and direct as possible and consequently would only be suitable for general distribution in Guyana in summary format. Yet the team believes it is necessary to address some of the central issues of democratic consolidation in Guyana head on, precisely because they are so often ignored, talked around, or shamelessly manipulated in contemporary political practice. The Guyanese political elite commonly practice the fine art of plausible deniability that allows them to use loaded references to race, and proxy actors, to garner votes from destructive racial polarization while at the same time denying any racial motive. Overall, the team is convinced that Guyana does not have a race problem, it has a politics problem.*

structures of state power when it was in the opposition prior to 1992. Today, the PPP/C indicates that decentralization is unwarranted, though perhaps necessary to please the donor community; however, the party has taken only modest steps in that direction. The People's National Congress/Reform PNC/R stance is 180 degrees opposite. The opposition now believes that the central state must cede significant control and power to municipalities and local areas – a position at odds with the party's views when it held the reigns of power.

- There is an 'all or nothing' approach to politics in Guyana that systematically devalues compromise and drives parties to criticize each other regardless of the issue. Credit is not given where credit is due, and blame is directed at the other party even when the accusing party's own shortcomings are obvious.
 - For example, the recent proclamation that local elections will likely be postponed is blamed on the opposition's intransigence, when in fact government spokesmen are well aware that their own preparations are also far behind schedule
 - Constitutional reform is currently stalled. The main parties are unable to come to terms on the detailed content and modalities of reform nor are they willing to implement reforms already agreed upon.

Rule of Law

Rule of law refers to the will and ability of a nation to enforce the rules of the political game. There may be consensus about the rules of the game, but without timely and consistent enforcement through judges, courts, statutes, lawyers, police, and informal means, there is no rule of law.

- The quality of rule of law in Guyana is very much mixed. Guyana demonstrates widespread rhetorical support for the institutions of justice and their vital function in a democratic society; however, there are many symptoms that suggest the Rule of Law is deeply troubled.
 - There is constitutional ambiguity and irrationality as evidenced by the Inter-Party Dialogue. The Dialogue is not a constitutional body but has begun to take on the trappings of a quasi-permanent body. In the short run, the Inter-Party Dialogue may be a healthy sign of the flexibility required to face acute political tensions, but if the dialogue goes on too long, it may reflect the system's engrained propensity for extra-constitutional rule.
 - In the area of human rights, extra-judicial killings by law enforcement personnel have long been a problem. Today, the PNC/R feels

victimized by police in a process of political revenge and is critical of ‘rogue forces’ in the police service. Prior to 1992, however, the opposition PPP/C had articulated the same notion – police targeting of opposition supporters for political reasons.

- Case backlogs become serious human rights issues when a large population of prisoners is on remand.
- Many informants noted that Guyana is extremely litigious. In a curious twist, those who do *not* want issues resolved and who benefit from the status quo often use the inefficient courts and long delays as a means of avoiding legal responsibility.. This is not only an abuse of the legal system, but also gives rise to opportunities for corruption.
- Charges of political interference in the courts are adamantly denied by high-level justice system actors but widely believed to occur on a regular basis.
- Corruption and mismanagement at the Magistrate level is a problem recognized by the justice system itself as well as other interested observers (Bar Association, defense lawyers, donors in the justice sector, etc).
- Narco-trafficking seems to pose a growing threat to public order and could develop into a major threat to political stability if left unchecked.

Competition

Free and open competition for power based on popular sovereignty is perhaps the defining element of democracy. Free and fair elections are critical, but other closely related realms of competition are equally important, i.e., checks and balances, democratic decentralization, economic competition, public space for pluralism, an active civil society, and competition for ideas, including free media and freedom of expression.

- In formal terms, the Guyanese political system allows open competition for public office and a multiplicity of political parties. Despite relentless polarization, Guyana has demonstrated progress in carrying out elections deemed free and fair, at least in technical terms, by neutral observers.
 - Elections are characteristically marked by racial block voting, heightened racial tensions, and significant violence.
- Competition in government is limited by a powerful executive and perhaps more importantly by an all-powerful inner cadre of party-based decision-makers. The apparatus of state and those of government and the ruling party are virtually indistinguishable.

- ‘Democratic centralism’ dominates the actions of political parties. High-level officials make decisions, and it is expected that the rank and file fall into line without question or debate.
- Parliament is feeble and currently crippled by gridlock over constitutional reform.
- Judiciary has nominal independence but remains overshadowed by a strong executive.
 - ✓ Problems of resources
 - ✓ Problems of political interference
- A political culture of open competition is notably lacking as discussed earlier under *Consensus*.
- The media in Guyana is free but woefully inadequate for objective news reporting, analyzing and commenting on public policy, and holding politicians accountable in the public arena.
 - Typically, the media is both blatantly politicized and manipulative or incapable of analysis.
 - Both print and broadcast media often allow themselves to be used by politicians to get their messages out without questioning facts.
 - ✓ For example, using clumsy editing of file footage, GTV made use of a GECOM press release to portray the USAID DG assessment team as poised to fund all of GECOM activities for the next five years! Yet, the assessment team was never at any point interviewed by GTV.
- Competition in the economic sphere is evident, but old patterns of distrust persist between the private sector and government and between different elements of the private sector. Antagonism among different elements of the private sector – often with a racial or political flavor – hinders investment and economic growth.
 - There are distinct differences in the vested interests of wealthier elements of the private sector based in Georgetown versus other business sectors, especially small and medium businesses and regional business interests.
 - Wealthy private sector interests in Georgetown tend to be elitist and are perceived as pandering to the government.

- New levels of activity and advocacy among regional Chambers of Commerce seems promising.
- There is evidence of growth in civil society organizations and activities during the past decade. New types of organizations have emerged. Some have carried out advocacy campaigns. Civil society has participated to some extent in the process of constitutional reform. Nevertheless, the role of non-governmental organizations in society is not clearly defined.
 - Civil society tends to be fragmented and poorly organized.
 - Many civil society organizations have internal organizational weaknesses and require institutional strengthening.
 - Party politics and ethnic polarization have an insidious effect on civil society organizations.
 - Civil society is stymied by external perception of party bias; watchdogs are muzzled by government charges of politicization.
 - The fundamental legitimacy of civil society as a political player is constantly questioned by the political class with the query “who elected them?”
 - Trade unionism in Guyana is a microcosm of the political system – public sector oriented, defined largely by ethnicity, and closely tied to major political parties.
 - Religious organizations play a watchdog role and have taken initiative to promote social peace and interfaith cooperation.
 - Women’s groups, the Bar Association, the Guyana Human Rights Association, and Regional Chambers of Commerce, are positive contributors.
 - There appears to be a genuine opening at present to organize locally around specific issues, as in the positive experience thus far of the NDI-assisted New Amsterdam Action Group.

Inclusion

A critical hallmark of democracy is inclusion. Formal institutions and informal practice should support the rights of all citizens to participate in both governmental and non-governmental arenas. Inclusion should be both broad and deep, with all segments of the population consulted to the greatest extent possible, which is consistent with efficient

government function. Rights of participation should be both guaranteed in law and most importantly in practice. Despite improvement since the Burnham era and spectacularly high rates of participation in national elections, perceptions of exclusion permeate the political and social life of the country.

- The use of race as a political marker has allowed it to become a particularly destructive tool of exclusion.
 - Parties prey on racial differences, fears of deprivation, histories of victimization, and ethnic insecurity to appeal to the basest instincts of Guyanese society.
 - Inclusion of ‘party crossers’ is a common tactic for both parties, but it is perceived as a façade, because appeals to race continue unabated.
- Geographic exclusion is also an important issue, with politics largely a function of Georgetown and to an important extent the coastal plain. Yet a large minority population of Amerindians as well as others inhabits the hinterlands. They are the poorest, most isolated, and most marginalized of Guyana’s citizens.
- Top-down, centralized politics excludes local citizens in a profound manner. Though citizens are the political shock [?] troops and the voting base of the two major parties, mechanisms to hear and respond to local issues, grievances, and opportunities are non-functional. The parties, the state apparatus, and the political culture all operate in hierarchical fashion to exclude massive segments of the population from even prosaic decisions.
 - The party-list mechanism deters accountability.
 - Engrained habits of democratic centralism do not allow grassroots perspectives to percolate upwards, even informally.
 - People feel ‘hard done by’ – victimized, ignored, exploited, and subject to top-down dictation. A profound sense of alienation could ultimately threaten state authority or be used cynically to further exacerbate racial tensions.

The assessment team believes that, as a whole, the issue of inclusion is of highest urgent priority and further judges that national level political figures and institutions are, at the present time, uniquely unsuited to make positive contributions in this area. Bluntly put, the parties and institutions of state have systematically created this situation. They are unlikely to be productive partners in battling both the symptoms and the root causes. Therefore, the assessment team urges a refocus on local government reform and local citizen participation.

Good Governance

Issues of good governance are intertwined with all four previous assessment variables. In the most immediate sense, good governance refers to efficiency and openness. In broader terms, the impact of all other variables comes together in the area of governance. Good governance is ‘where the rubber meets the road;’ it is the effective delivery of basic public goods that citizens can reasonably expect from a democratic state.

- Guyana is an anomaly of high potential for governance capacity and low levels of political will.
- Despite serious challenges, Guyana demonstrates high governance capacity in areas as diverse as election management, legal training, judicial analysis and management, educational systems, and maintenance of a complex infrastructure.
 - Guyana works remarkably well: Street lights function, streets are clean, and a huge public works infrastructure of dikes, irrigation, and seawalls is in place. Despite deterioration, ongoing efforts are taken to assure infrastructure integrity.
 - Guyana does not suffer at all by comparison to countries with a similar level of economic development in spite of serious declines since the 1970s.
- The team thus concludes that Guyana can create or maintain a high level of capacity in areas that it focuses on and prioritizes. Shortcomings in democracy and governance appear to be primarily, though not exclusively, problems of political will.
- Incentives for reform are not in place. Parties follow the shortsighted logic of electoral politics with little regard for delivering the fruits of democratic life.
- Inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and mismanagement are rife in tendering, contracting, investment code drafting, court case management, deeds register, magistrate courts, traffic police, and the assessment and collection of local government rates, to name only a few.
- Citizen advocacy groups are few and weak.
- The brain drain generates overseas remittances that help keep the economy afloat, but the brain drain has a severe impact on government capacity, since the government cannot compete with the private sector for the best young talent or seasoned managers.

The main set of strategy recommendations emerges out of the discussion of Good Governance, but these recommendations draw fully on problems and opportunities identified through analysis of the other four variables.

Strategy Recommendations

The team views local government and local-level citizen participation as clearly the most promising – and perhaps the only logical point of entrée given Guyana’s current political situation. National actors have proven to be self-interested, unwilling, uncooperative, and largely untrustworthy, while pilot efforts at local levels have offered much more promise.

Local governance should by no means be idealized. In some instances it efficiently re-articulates the pathologies of the political center and can be the site of significant anti-democratic activity. Ultimately only the Guyanese can meet the difficult challenges ahead and hold their political leaders accountable. By focusing on local government capacity building and by promoting the ability of local citizens to interact positively and consistently on issues, a new culture of democracy may emerge. In the long term, empowered and efficient local communities can have an impact on top-down parties. When electoral blocs become threatened, parties will be forced to respond and allow greater inclusion at higher levels of government. This in turn will require politicians to join together and reach consensus – further enabling positive political interactions. This is a long-range vision and requires a long-term strategy.

In the area of *Consensus* the team recommends the following:

- Prospective local government officials (most likely to be party members) represent immediate opportunities for training in local government function and the need for concerted consensus building.
- At the national level, a cross-party retreat of promising young party leaders – aimed at understanding and playing a leading role in effective local governance reform – may serve as a carrot to induce acceptance of what otherwise could be perceived as meddling.
- Many minority groups are denied the opportunity to have their voice heard or to fulfill their potential. This is particularly true for women. The Mission should expand and strengthen programs that encourage participation and measures that ensure the inclusion of women in the decision-making process. All opportunities for training should ensure gender balance where it is practicable to do so.
- The intractable nature of Guyanese ethnic-politics points to the need for alternative conflict resolution mechanisms. In this regard, the duly constituted Ethnic Relation Commission may represent a target for modest levels of technical support. Support for peace education and peace councils (in collaboration with the UNAG) should complement traditional decision making activities of the

courts and the legislature. The project could productively incorporate incoming visits of elder statesmen and public fora for face-to-face interaction.

In the area of Rule of Law the team recommends:

- Continuing USAID ongoing support to the statutory process and to the Joint Task Force on Local Government Reform.
 - In particular USAID should take every opportunity to underscore and support a full and meaningful implementation of the constitution's Articles 74 {3} and 75, which provide for an autonomous democratic local government structure. This should work against the installation of the pathologies of party control at the most local level.
- The role of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in relation to the new Local Government Commission will need to be established. USAID should consider technical assistance to aid in clarifying and rationalizing the legal status of the Commission and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development with an eye to promoting maximum autonomy at the local level.
- The newly elected local governance organs will be charged with a greater role in law and order and rule of law than is currently the case. While the scope of this change is yet to be determined, staff and elected officials will need training and knowledge regarding a host of issues that they have previously not been asked to consider. As part of an overall training and TA package (recommended under *Good Governance* below) there should be modules to develop competencies that would allow effective policymaking as well as oversight of law and order and functions of the rule of law.
- Mechanisms for local alternative dispute resolution (community-based and local government-based) could be an important mechanism to prevent local policy makers from adding to case backlogs.
- USAID should continue periodic institutional support for the Bar Association, the Association of Women Lawyers, and Legal Aid, particularly in their efforts to conduct outreach to local areas. Targeted at local citizen participation as well as local governance officials, this should take the form of assistance for publications, public education, citizenship training, popular legal training, legal or constitutional training. Substantive focus should be on LG reforms, local governance functions, and the legal role of citizen organizations.
 - In addition, USAID should identify and support other local NGOs in diffusion of information on LG reforms.

To respond to issues in the area of *Competition*, the team recommends the following:

- One priority of the Guyana Electoral Commission (GECOM) is the compilation of a National Rolling Register. The registration function may need to be decentralized to existing local government offices such as the Regional Democratic Council (RDC). The Mission may be well placed to provide modest support but not to create independent regional registration offices.
- Support for independent media is a component of Mission efforts to promote the development of democratic practices and institutions. Other donors have provided crucial financial support on the regulation of the broadcast media and the implementation of adequate legislation. Additional unattended problems include poor journalistic standards and editorial mismanagement. The Mission is well placed to provide journalistic training for responsible investigative reporting on issues rather than events that exacerbate tensions in the society. Such training should include talk show hosts who have been some of the worst offenders in inciting unrest. The focus of training should be coverage and analysis of constitutional reforms relating to local governance, establishment of local government ‘beats,’ and helping reporters become more knowledgeable about these issues.
- The team recommends civic education programs and media campaigns that explain the nature of local government reform and the role of civil society. This should include media and civic education to promote particular policy agendas of local communities.
- The duly constituted Local Government Commission (when formed) will complement reforms and prospects envisaged here for local governance. The Mission should provide support to the Commission in the form of technical assistance and training with a view to enhancing the enabling environment for all local government officials.
- The role of civil society can be improved by strengthening group partners in local governance. The New Amsterdam Action Group serves as a pilot project for action-oriented, non-partisan partnerships with local government. Support should be proactive in nature; the Mission should specifically target issue-focused partnerships that straddle both race and party politics.
- The Mission should build on its success in facilitating private sector collaboration at local and regional levels, especially with small and medium-sized businesses. This offers the advantage of being an important cross-sectoral linkage for DG and EG SOs.

In the area of *Inclusion*, the team recommends the following:

- The cause of inclusive governance would be served by ongoing program support for constitutional reform. This could take the form of support for an ongoing

reform process as well as implementation of local government reforms already agreed upon, including:

- Establishment of the Local Government Commission
 - Further efforts toward democratic decentralization
 - Modes of representation that ensure accountability to citizens and local communities (constituency based representation)
- Program support should be made available for civil society advocacy on behalf of the Ethnic Relations Commission and other parliamentary commissions focused on inclusion, including human rights and gender equity.
- Program support should facilitate actions that focus on practical local concerns cutting across ethnic differences.
- Some program effort should directly address problems of ethnic insecurity via forums, workshops, media campaigns, and collaborative efforts, especially at the local level.

In the area of *Good Governance*, the team recommends the following:

- A full-featured, in-depth capacity building program to enhance efficiency and accountability in local government institutions. The more tactical elements of the programs should address strategic planning, budgeting, accounting procedures, consultation, community participation, bureaucratic survival, taxation, and legal education.
- The Mission should prioritize actions that enhance the governing capacity of what is likely to be a very high proportion of new-intake RDC and NDC counselors. This might include strategic efforts in the area of information technologies, provision of computer equipment, operational handbooks and networks.

Section I Introduction

Race, Politics, or Simple Politesse?

It was a little thing. A group of 16-yearold schoolboys were on their way home laughing, sipping from Coke bottles, and walking up a busy Georgetown street. Nearby, an elderly Indo-Guyanese woman flinched and struggled to make her way through the morass of motor scooters, rushing mini-buses, and honking taxis -- it was clear that because of her frailty, she was in over her head. One of the young students looked up, noticing the woman halfway into the street. He did what he had been taught to do. He shouted down a minibus driver and waved a taxi to a stop as he stepped directly into the traffic. He then ran over to the woman and gently helped her across four lanes of busy traffic. He dashed back across the street and rejoined his friends whose reactions were appropriate, a brief tease and a fist on the arm and they on their way. It was nothing. Any one of them would have done the same thing had they noticed her first.

Of course in Guyana, the fact that the schoolboy was Afro-Guyanese and the woman Indo-Guyanese could make a prosaic act of kindness into a meaningful political act. It is significant for democracy and governance assessment precisely because race did not enter into the calculations of either protagonist. There was no time to think about the fact that the old woman probably voted PPP/C in the last election and that the young boy may well have hopped on the minibus to Buxton, hotbed of support for the PNC/R. The traffic moved on and no one noticed. In that instant, they captured the ideal and the genius of Guyana's national capacity.

Unfortunately, though such moments are repeated thousands of times a day in Guyana, the tenor and tone of politics here rarely cultivates such civility. Instead, politics in Guyana plays on difference, accentuates conflict, cultivates mistrust, and profits from the stalled social and economic development that results. Yet that moment of human kindness and mutual support is a snap shot of the interdependency and cultural pluralism that normally prevails in Guyana.

We want to be clear. It serves no one to romanticize away obvious cultural differences and a profound set of prejudices that exist among people on both sides of the racial and political divide in Guyana. Yet, inspite of decades of political manipulations, these divisions are not so extreme or so profound that they cannot be bridged in a healthy, well-functioning, democratic system. Guyana today is not such a system.

Guyana is a polity characterized by politicized racialization. This term captures the fundamental phenomena whereby extant racial differences are exploited and emphasized for political gain. In numerous discussions with the assessment team, literally dozens of interlocutors from all levels of Guyanese society repeatedly made this point: "We live together peacefully, we eat each others food, care for each others children, we attend each others weddings, and support each other in hard times. But when election time comes, the politicians from Georgetown sow discontent."

The fact that violence tends to follow the electoral cycle, or responds to other moments of political tension, suggests that violence and ethnic conflict are primarily a product of political manipulation and not inherent of inevitable social, ethnic, and racial conflicts. A chief danger for Guyana is that contemporary events become tomorrow's history. Continued conflict overlaid on past injustices – whether perceived or real – has created structural patterns of distrust that virtually define the political system. The risk is that these toxic patterns – if left unchallenged – will penetrate to the very core of Guyanese society.

Though we may be able to assert today that racial tensions in Guyana are imposed from the political class, the success of such imposition over time can have the effect of creating much greater division and deeper societal cleavages. Thus a vicious circle of political manipulation paired with localized events of violence leads to a spiral of distrust, revenge, and mutual disdain. The continuation of such cycles can rapidly escape the control of the politicians who promote them. Alternatively, such cycles can lead to the promotion of increasingly polarized and extreme politicians who in turn use more vicious tactics to widen the racial gap. In extreme cases, (Rwanda, Bosnia, and Nazi Germany) genocide resulted. Yet these extreme cycles are not inevitable in Guyana or even probable if citizens take advantage of a set of unique attributes that Guyana possesses.

This assessment lays out the challenges faced in contemporary Guyana in the areas of democracy and governance. It then suggests a broad strategy that responds to Guyanese political realities, opportunities offered by local government elections slated for the coming year, and the comparative advantages offered by USAID and by the past programming in the DG SO by USAID/Guyana. In the context of the broad strategy recommendations, the team also includes a set of suggested activities considered consistent with the proposed strategy. The activity recommendations should be considered illustrative or suggestive rather than definitive.

The DG Assessment Method, Framework, and Findings

The Democracy Center of USAID regularly conducts DG assessments around the globe using a standard research tool. Typically, teams spend three weeks in the country and meet with a host of political actors, from high-level political operatives to civil society representatives as well as a sampling of local-level politicians and community groups. The Guyana DG assessment team began work in Washington conducting preliminary interviews with USAID implementing partners, other donors, and reviewing reports and research on Guyana. After a team planning meeting, the team assembled in Guyana with three members: two expatriate researchers and a Guyanese lecturer in government at the University of Guyana. The team spent 17 days in Guyana including a three-day field trip to Barbice, New Amsterdam, and Corriverton. Through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, the team assembled a series of impressions on the current state of democracy in Guyana.

Section II Recent Political History and Current Political Environment

After more than thirty-four years as an independent nation and nearly ten years of efforts to consolidate democratic institutions, the evidences of Guyana's social, political, and economic decline are obvious. Massive outward migration, racial polarization, breakdown in social relationships, the increasing menace of drugs, rising rates of HIV/AIDS, unemployment and poverty combine to pose dramatic challenges. The oppressive situations of many women and the hopeless state of large numbers of unemployed youth are largely unattended. Free and fair elections created many vistas for change in the 1990s but failed to deliver the stability and security that some had hoped would result.

The enormity of the problems renders ineffective the capacity of government, even if it had the will, to solve all these problems on its own. Social partners have limited space to contribute their physical, financial, and intellectual resources to enable this richly endowed country to achieve its potential, and its citizens – across race, class, gender, age and other differences – to achieve equality in all spheres of national life. The legacies of colonialism and external intervention shape Guyana's domestic agenda. Though operating in a context molded by history, the nation, and its political leadership, has yet to extricate itself from the past and craft a way forward that reaches beyond political racialization. Thus a more recent account of political events is most relevant to the goals of this assessment.

While Desmond Hoyte, who burst unto the political scene after the death of the highly authoritarian Forbes Burnham, earned the pseudonym “Desmond Persaud”, his efforts to include Indo-Guyanese brought minuscule change to the racial polarization that continues to pervade society. Hoyte expressed determination to turn Guyana around. His early lifting of the ban on flour, establishment of a Code of Conduct to attract foreign investors, “freeing up” of the Party controlled press and radio, and invitations to the western powers to reintegrate Guyana through new political and economic strategies- left many Guyanese wondering if he was showing disdain for his predecessor. Others opined that Hoyte had always held divergent views but he could not openly express them for fear of the powerful Burnham.

The silver lining was beginning to peek through the clouds. Foreign investors were taking a second look at Guyana given the change in economic philosophy and the adoption of structural adjustment programs under the aegis of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Local investors expressed renewed hope in the private sector and the Indo- Guyanese were widely supportive of Hoyte. He was regarded as the statesman Guyana needed to recover from a paralyzed socialist economy.

However, the elections of the People's National Congress [PNC] continued to attract enormous criticism particularly from the main Opposition People's Progressive Party [PPP/C] and other civil society groups pointing out that they were routinely rigged.

Confident in placing the vilified electoral process under closer international scrutiny while at the same time powerless to resist international conditionalities, Hoyte decided to go to a transparent poll in 1992. It is claimed that Desmond Hoyte, despite advice (from PNC comrades) to the contrary, was responsible for the presence of former President Jimmy Carter to monitor Guyana's General and Regional Elections. When Carter declared the PPP/C winner of the 5 October 1992 elections, the 28-year PNC Administration passed into history.

The defeat of an over-confident Hoyte was assured by the false security some Indo-Guyanese wove around him. Given current demographics, a PNC/R victory at the polls could only be secured by an exodus from racial voting. The main political contenders PPP/C and PNC/R continue to appeal to the ethnic insecurities of the Afro and Indo Guyanese. The race rivalry persists over an estimated population of 770,100 (48% Indos, 33 % Afros, other ethnic groups 19 %). All those who turned out to welcome and garland Hoyte as he campaigned in their districts, have remained unable to endorse his leadership since that time. The PNC has mounted repeated claims of electoral fraud and manipulation of the Voter's List to disenfranchise its supporters. Further, the dissent of the PNC supporters has been expressed through political protests, many of which become violent on less than acceptable levels and frequency.

Initially, PPP/C's election through the person of Dr. Cheddi Jagan's was widely accepted and even the staunchest critics argued that his prolonged period in opposition made him a leader with a great deal of credibility. But political resentment set in when the PPP/C administration engaged in positive discrimination in an attempt to deal with its own insecurity as an Indo-government in the hands of an Afro-dominated public bureaucracy and armed forces. Bereft of the professional talent necessary to transform a moribund bureaucracy, the PPP/C looked inward, placing narrow political loyalty above merit and efficiency. Through the five years since the death of the founder leader, the ascension to office by his widow Mrs. Janet Jagan and later President Bharrat Jagdeo the administration has been imbued with charges of nepotism and graft, and Ministers and party officials have been perceived as engaging on ostentatious lifestyles. The PPP/C of course hotly denies any assertion that they have engaged in clientalism, nepotism or other abuses of power. When presented with evidence to the contrary, the most common response is to point out that the PNC/R plundered the state while in power for 28 years. The unstated implication is that the PPP/C is only engaged in evening the score and that critics ought not concern themselves with alleged irregularities until the PPP/C has had an equal amount of time in power.

Brain Drain and Human Capacity Issues

Today, the flight of human capital to the US and Canada and other Caribbean islands still provides a formidable challenge to development. This trend first commenced under Burnham's repressive socialist policies, as political opponents were ridiculed, charged, and dragged before the Courts. Under the Hoyte rule, slow economic progress and the effects of structural adjustments left many no choice but to seek a new life on "greener pastures". The low wages and salary structure alongside high unemployment, declining

world market prices for rice and sugar, and lack of targeted foreign direct investments still force many to migrate. The remittances from abroad are certainly a rich source of foreign currency but direct foreign investment and enduring economic growth relies on an educated and capable work force. In the case of Guyana, while many patriotic citizens remain, the loss of a highly skilled professional classes mean that human capacity issues abound and threaten the ability of the state to respond to bureaucratic imperatives.

Poverty Reduction Focus and Constitutional Reform

Guyana is currently engaged in the HIPIC debt reduction negotiations with the World Bank and IMF and has recently authored a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The PRSP represents the outline of development strategy and priorities for Guyana. Donors are expected to step in and fill gaps that might otherwise go under funded. One important focus of Guyana's PRSP is local governance issues which are hypothesized to have an important relationship to poverty because of the anticipated greater efficiency that emerges from local government in social service delivery. Of equal importance is the greater accountability that local government is capable of demonstrating because of its proximity to local concerns. The PRSP provides an ideal strategy linkage point for donors interested in local governance reform for this reason. In combination with the constitutional reforms that highlight a new and increased role for local governance, there is ample room for donors to assist the stated priority development goals of Guyana.

Section III Actors, Interests, and Institutions

Actors, institutions, and the play of interests or incentives are determinant elements in transition to democracy, or, conversely, in stifling innovation and reform in the political system. This section reviews a number of specific elements in Guyana's political environment and assesses the current or potential role of these actors and institutions, including both constraints and opportunities for transition to a more democratic system.

Political Parties

Political parties in Guyana pre-date both national independence in 1966 and earlier attainment of universal franchise in 1953 under the colonial regime. The Popular Party was active in the 1920s and 1930s and the Labour Party in the 1940s (Jagan 1997, 59-60). The country's first major party was the People's Progressive Party (PPP) formed in 1950. With a solid base in organized labor, the PPP emerged as a genuinely multi-racial party committed to socialist ideology and struggle against colonialism.

The major political parties in Guyana are closely allied with the trade union movement. Indian and African workers in the early 20th century joined forces to struggle for better wages and the eight-hour day (*ibid*, 292). In 1950, the PPP built on this precedent and organized in urban and rural areas around both African and Indian oriented labor unions.²

This proved to be a highly successful political strategy. The PPP won three successive electoral victories in 1953, 1957, and 1961; however, between 1955 and 1958, the PPP was torn by internal crisis and acrimonious rivalry between Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham. According to Jagan, initial PPP support for a West Indies Federation was opposed by Hindu pandits and others on the basis that Indian interests would be submerged by an African-dominated regional Federation. At this point, some Indian leaders originated the term *apan jhaat*, or vote for your 'own race,' to frighten Indian voters from the PPP in 1953 elections, using an appeal to 'racist emotionalism' (Jagan 1997, 114). Jagan later dropped his support for the West Indies Federation.

In the mid-1950s, there were two competing parties operating under the same name (PPP), with urban-rural and racial differences in their respective bases of support. In the wake of 1957 elections, the party formally split along racially polarized lines, and Burnham formed the People's National Congress (PNC). The PNC first competed against the People's Progressive Party in general elections of 1961.

The early 1960s were deeply marked by political-racial strife and racial bloc voting. In 1964 elections, the PNC allied itself with The United Force (TUF), founded in 1960 as a party oriented to urban business interests and Catholic, Portuguese, Chinese and Amerindian minorities. Through this alliance, the PNC was able to win the 1964

² Indian and African refer here to Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese respectively.

elections despite a numerical minority of Afro-Guyanese voters and stayed in power for 28 years.

Both PPP and PNC interlocutors encountered by this assessment team echoed statements made by Cheddi Jagan a generation ago – denial of party racialism – at least in ideological terms, while noting that the colonial regime had used race and ethnicity to divide and rule. Jagan had quoted, somewhat defensively, a 1964 comment by a British government spokesman whose words are as applicable today as four decades ago: “The main cause of the present situation is the organization of political parties on racial lines, each appealing to racial fears and prejudices.”³

More recently, in the wake of racially tinged protests and controversy that erupted over the disputed 1997 elections, the two major parties signed the Herdmanston Accord in January 1998 and the Saint Lucia Statement in July 1998, following negotiations facilitated by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The parties agreed to an outside audit of the 1997 elections, a temporary moratorium on public demonstrations and marches, sustained inter-party dialogue, establishment of a Constitutional Reform Commission including civil society participation, commitment to improved race relations, and avoidance of inflammatory language.

The moratorium on demonstrations and inflammatory rhetoric was indeed temporary; each were starkly evident during the period of this assessment (April 2002). When the assessment team interviewed the Chief Justice, PNC/R demonstrators passed in front of the High Court chanting “we must have justice” – an indication of freedom of speech but not of inter-party dialogue.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the Herdmanston Accord, the government established the Constitution Reform Commission, whose recommendations were subsequently passed by Parliament. Furthermore, the bipartisan Local Government Task Force met regularly since last year to develop local government legislation.

Inter-party dialogue was also duly established on a range of policy issues, but this has not been sustained. Initially, the establishment of inter-party dialogue gave rise to hope for change and a momentary pause in the unrest and political violence that has long dogged Guyanese politics – almost the entire period since the 1997 elections. In retrospect, despite some progress toward reform, the post-Herdmanston period has seen virtually no improvement in Guyanese racial politics. During the period of interviews for this assessment, the inter-party dialogue was on ‘pause’ and the opposition upped the ante to ‘active non-cooperation.’

Following the Herdmanston Accord, though somewhat delayed, the government carried out new national elections in March 2001. In February 2001, 13 political parties applied to the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) with a view to participating in elections.

³ See Jagan (1997, 289-303). The quote is attributed to Cecil King, a British representative to a UN committee (page 303). The original text of Jagan’s *The West on Trial* was written in 1964, shortly after the British forced the PPP out of the government of British Guiana.

GECOM accredited 11 parties, but only eight parties contested in enough regions to compete nationally:

Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance (GAP/WPA)
Guyana Democratic Party (GDP)
Justice for All Party (JFAP)
National Front Alliance (NFA)
People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R)
People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C)
Rise, Organize and Rebuild (ROAR)
The United Force (TUF)

The March 2001 elections attained high voter turnout, totaling 89 percent. The PPP/C won the presidency and a clear majority in parliament – 34 of 65 seats. As the other major party, the PNC/R won 27 seats in parliament. Three minority parties won a total of four seats – GAP/WPA (2 seats), ROAR (1), and TUF (1). These elections replicated the long-standing pattern of party politics since the 1950s – domination of elections by two major rival parties with a common origin – a veritable duopoly of party dominance.

The duopoly is based primarily on two fairly closely matched racial-ethnic voting blocks in a multi-ethnic context in which Indo-Guyanese constitute a demographic plurality and Afro-Guyanese a large minority. There is of course a pattern of ethnic 'crossover' voting for both major parties. A number of informants for this assessment noted that PNC/R (Afro-Guyanese constituency) had perhaps double the ethnic crossover voting rate of the PPP/C (Indo-Guyanese constituency) in the 2001 elections, with crossover rates estimated at 20 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The PPP/C General Secretary claimed much higher rates of crossover voting in Linden and Bartica – areas with relatively high concentrations of Afro-Guyanese. Nevertheless, the crossover votes – vaunted by both parties as evidence of their multiethnic appeal – only confirm the overwhelming 80- to 90-percent racial bloc-voting base of both parties.

In short, the reform process set in place by Herdmanston is presently stymied, constitutional reforms have not been implemented, relations between the two major parties continue to be marked by inflammatory language, and Standing Committees in parliament have not been established. The two parties have demonstrated little willingness to compromise or to use parliament as the primary forum for open debate on policy.

Both parties view compromise as a sign of weakness. Both parties tend to be hegemonic in relation to other institutions, especially public institutions. Despite an opening in the system since 1992, the tendency toward party hegemony continues and encroaches on private space as well as public institutions. This pattern was firmly established in the Burnham years. Under Burnham the PNC explicitly announced a policy of party hegemony over all institutions of society.⁴

⁴ See Library of Congress (1992), *Guyana: A Country Study*, "Constitution of 1980" (Chapter IV).

It may be that the major parties have relatively little vested interest in thorough reform since reform could threaten their duopoly of power and their long-standing tendency toward hegemonic control when in power. Party leaders tend to view reform through near-term political filters: Does it hurt us as a party, and will it help us win the next election? In general, the parties are reluctant to reach out to people or to consult civil society. Civil society advocacy is viewed as interference or political opposition. There appears to be little opening for donor-funded political party training. The current party system is entrenched, and party training could be perceived as an admission of weakness.

Reform does not in fact appear necessary to win elections; loyalty to the PPP/C remains assured due to ethnic insecurity and the Indo-Guyanese demographic plurality. For the governing party, true reforms may be viewed as concessions to the opposition. On the other hand, the PNC/R retains the capacity to mobilize people for demonstrations and to literally shut down the city. This situation does not lend itself to dialogue. Nevertheless, most informants in the present assessment retained hope for eventual renewal of inter-party dialogue, and saw the renewal of dialogue as the only way out of the political crisis and unrest in the streets.

The two major parties are in transition and to some extent internally divided. The PPP/C shows evidence of division between an older generation of hardliners and young reformers. The PPP/C is dominated by a small group of party leaders sometimes identified as the ‘gang of eight.’ The president does not apparently operate as a free agent, independently of this powerful inner circle. On the PNC/R side, there is some evidence that the current party leader and former president may step down in the not-too-distant future. Both parties are thus presently affected by the gradual passing of a generation of party leaders who have exercised power for five decades.

Are there points of entrée into this seemingly intractable duopoly of party power? One element is of course the electoral process itself; elections are also a direct channel for working with political parties. The Guyana Electoral Commission is presently based on active party representation within the Commission. Minority parties play a limited role in the present duopoly; however, if minority parties ever won even a relatively small number of additional seats, they would be well positioned to serve as powerbrokers. Finally, local elections offer an opportunity for change in the system and will create a need for capacity building among newly elected officials, particularly if there is progress in decentralizing government.

Executive Branch

The National Assembly has adopted recommendations of the Constitution Reform Commission regarding the presidency.⁵ These have the effect of reducing the concentration of presidential power enshrined in the 1980 constitution – a constitution

⁵ See Cooperative Republic of Guyana, “Appendix: Constitution Reform Commission’s Specific Recommendations as Approved by the special Select Committee and Adopted by the National Assembly.”

designed for one man. Constitutional changes now limit a person holding the office of president to no more than two consecutive five-year terms. The president and other cabinet members are collectively responsible to parliament, and must resign if the government is defeated by a parliamentary majority vote of no confidence. Under the reform, the president's ability to dissolve parliament is removed, presidential impeachment is made easier, and presidential ability to abolish public offices is removed.

Despite reforms that reduce presidential power and support greater separation of powers, the presidency remains a very strong center of power. The presidency is far more powerful than parliament or any other branch of government. In practice, however, the president is still beholden to his party, and particularly to a small circle of party leaders.

Ministries

Some informants note the weakness of many government institutions at present and allege that it is easier to go through party headquarters rather than duly constituted ministries. It's clear that some ministries are woefully understaffed. Some informants suggest that the quality of human resources in ministries has tended to decline in recent years. Factors in this decline include a high rate of out-migration, especially among those better educated, and low pay for government jobs.

Parliament

In 2000, the National Assembly enacted electoral reforms including gender and geographical representation in parliament. It also significantly reduced the number of non-elected members of parliament – now limited to six Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries eligible to sit in parliament. The Reform also calls for establishment of a second chamber – an upper house consisting of representatives of each region and of civil society. This has not been implemented.

Parliament is to a large extent dysfunctional at present due to the breakdown of party dialogue and the limited implementation of reforms. This has inhibited the establishment of Standing Committees. Political parties emerged historically to win elections but not to play their role in a parliamentary system in which the parliament plays a pivotal governing role. Parliament has historically served as a rubber stamp supporting a powerful presidency.

There's no real tradition of a parliament with oversight roles, standing committees, technical staff, rule-driven debate, consultation, or sharing of information – what a government spokesman called an “executive” parliament. A broad range of interlocutors in this assessment have noted that the Westminster model was imposed on Guyana – a political environment with little or no experience of power sharing, compromise, loyal opposition, or reasoned public debate on policy. In this context, party politics take precedence over governance.

Elections for the National Assembly are based on lists of candidates rather than individuals – a system of indirect voting and proportional representation. The Elections Commission then apportions seats as a percentage of the votes for candidate lists. Proportional representation emerged historically as a palliative in response to racial strife around elections stemming from parties defined by racial bloc voting. It also has the effect of making parliamentarians subject to the party hierarchy rather than accountable to local constituencies of voters.

Justice System

The language of constitutional reforms strengthens the independent role of the judiciary, removes judges from political control, and buttresses the role of the Judicial Service Commission in making appointments. Under the reform, the president must accept recommendations made by the Judicial Service Commission. The reform also imposes an obligation for judges to perform judicial duties in a ‘timely’ manner. This provision responds to a serious, long-standing backlog of cases and problems of delayed justice. The reform also makes provision for Guyana to accede to the Caribbean Court of Justice.

In actual practice, Guyana’s judiciary is not sufficiently independent, although it has perhaps been more independent of the executive branch than has parliament. The new Judicial Service Commission has not yet been established. The judiciary is not self-regulating financially – a situation that undercuts its independence. Justice has relatively little experience going to court and winning against the government. Nevertheless, the Chief Justice states that the judiciary has quashed rulings of the executive without political interference.

Administration of justice is plagued by a significant backlog of unheard cases going back six years or more. The courts are severely understaffed, and judges are underpaid. A full complement of judges in the High Court would be 11 judges, but there are presently only seven. At the level of magistrates, only 12 of 21 slots have been filled.

Criminal justice is beset by delays. Length of time in custody is extremely long, and prisoners are not credited for time served when their cases are judged. The Chancellor of the Judiciary reports that 42 percent of the prison population is on remand awaiting trial.

There is corruption in the system. Files disappear from the registry. Some informants referred to a culture of dishonesty that affects law enforcement at lower levels of the judicial system. Policing is generally perceived as corrupt. Police investigation doesn’t make reliable use of forensic methods, relying instead on confessions. There have been numerous accusations of extra-judicial killings. Law enforcement is presently in crisis and a bone of contention for inter-party struggle, unrest, and a war of words.

Donor assistance in the area of justice has tended to be fragmented. There has not been an integrated approach to assist inter-connected institutions of policing and law enforcement, the courts, and the penal system. It would be useful to have alternatives to the interminable delay in courts, including alternative dispute resolution.

Other Independent Constitutional Bodies

Guyana Election Commission (GECOM)

Recent creation of a permanent electoral commission is an important milestone. As noted earlier, the Commission is a direct channel for working with political parties. Donors are willing to support Commission operations since it has been successful in organizing elections deemed free and fair – a tangible achievement. GECOM anticipates organizing local elections and seeks to de-concentrate operations at regional levels. There is not yet a calendar or enabling legislation for local elections due to the breakdown of inter-party dialogue and stasis in parliament.

Local Government Commission

The bipartisan Task Force on Local Government has made progress in its work despite acrimonious relations between the two major parties. Constitutional amendments provide for local governmental autonomy, including raising local revenues through taxation. Amendments also provide for a Local Government Commission, but parliament has not established the Commission due to the inability of the two parties to agree on committee structures of parliament. The Local Government Commission would have nation-wide jurisdiction over all sections of the Local Government System.

Regional and Local Levels of Government

There was a 24-year hiatus between local elections in 1970 – widely recognized as rigged – and the next local elections held in 1994. Local elections are presently on hold pending renewal of inter-party dialogue and the passage of enabling legislation.

Guyana is composed of 10 regions and six incorporated municipalities – Georgetown, Corriverton, Linden, New Amsterdam, Rose Hall and Ana Regina. Other new municipalities are under consideration. The sub-national levels of government include the following:

- Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs)
- Municipal Councils
- Neighborhood Democratic Councils (NDCs)
- Village councils
- Community Councils
- Amerindian Village Councils

The current electoral system for local government is based on proportional representation and allows political parties and independent groups to compete for local office. As an innovation, constitutional reforms now provide for individuals to contest local elections as well as parties or civic groups. Constitutional amendment also provides for re-establishment of Village Councils or Community Councils if requested by the

community. The Task Force on Local Government is proposing a media campaign to make the public aware of local government issues, reforms, and prospects for greater community involvement in local governance.

In addition to six regional level municipalities, there are 65 Neighborhood Development Councils actively invoked (out of 129 Councils). Village councils presently exist in the hinterland under the Amerindian Act. All local government actions are presently administered by the Ministry of Local Government, including those in Amerindian Village Councils.

The reforms open the possibility of resuscitating village councils, which had been dissolved and incorporated into Neighborhood Development Councils. The rationale for their dissolution was that village and community councils were not financially viable. Another motivation for the larger coverage of Neighborhood Development Councils was to diminish ethnically segregated jurisdictions. Therefore, future resuscitation of village councils may well create some tension. For example, there's a strong demand to create a village council in Buxton – a village that is predominantly Afro-Guyanese and a lightning rod for politico-racial unrest. There are also pressures to keep political parties out of local government. The Task Force on Local Government is giving some consideration to creating a dual system at the level of Neighborhood Development Council level – a system based on wards along with proportional representation. Town Councils would be constituency based using a ward system.

In short, a process of reform is underway that favors more autonomous and accountable local government. The modalities of local elections and administration are still in the making. It is important to note that these rules of the game will have a significant impact on the tendency of local level politics to either prove copacetic or alternatively to re-articulate the pathologies of racial politicization. It remains to be seen whether this amounts to a thorough decentralization of government. The process, however, is unquestionably a special opportunity for donor support. It seems likely that local government elections will take place in the not-too-distant future, perhaps as soon as mid-year 2003.

Civil Society

There is evidence of growth in civil society organizations and activities during the past decade, a response to increased space for civil society organizations in the wake of 1992 elections. New types of local non-governmental organizations have emerged as development organizations in contrast to traditional service organizations, such as the YMCA. Some civil society organizations have carried out advocacy campaigns. Civil society has participated to some extent in the process of constitutional reform.

Human Rights and Good Governance

A number of civil society organizations have become active in policy advocacy for the rights of disadvantaged groups, such as Amerindians, women, children, and prisoners.

The Guyana Human Rights Association, the Bar Association, and the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers have advocated on behalf of constitutional reform. The human rights association has shown an interest in policing and law enforcement, extra-judicial killings, court monitoring, the penal system, strike monitoring, and race relations. Labor unions have established special committees on behalf of human rights and improved race relations. The Association of Women Lawyers volunteered considerable time to popular education on women's rights and citizen rights.

Religious Groups

The Guyana Council of Churches plays an advocacy role as a watchdog or 'conscience' of society, denouncing injustice and supporting reform. The Council is unusual in that it includes both Catholic and Protestant churches. It is not necessarily perceived as politically neutral in relation to party politics, and has traditionally been viewed as opposition.

Religious tolerance is an issue because of the sheer number of different religions. The Inter Religious Organization encompasses Christians, Hindus, Bahais, Muslims, Amerindian Alleluia groups, Orthodox Jews, Rastafarians, Jordanites, Saibaba, Moonies, and Raja Yoga. The Inter Religious Organization promotes religious tolerance on the grounds that politico-racial labels lend themselves to religious intolerance in this highly polarized social context in which one's color may signify religious affiliation. For example, Afro-Guyanese tend to be Christian, and Indo-Guyanese are more likely to be Hindu or Muslim – although there are Indo-Guyanese Christians and Afro-Guyanese Muslims.

Since 1992 there have been pandits, pastors, and imams serving in public office. Electoral campaigns in 1997 and 2001 included anti-Christian and anti-Hindu statements in public discourse – and the intrusion of party politics into religious affiliation. Therefore, the Council of Churches and the Inter Religious Organization have taken proactive positions on religious tolerance as a tool to combat racism and the politicization of religious-racial affiliation.

The Peace Education Institute (PEI) is an unusual Islamic initiative. It comprises a broad cross section of NGOs and religious bodies. In the past there has been relatively little Islamic collaboration with other religious bodies. The PEI provides a broad scope for networking, including Bahai, Guyana Council of Churches, the NGO Forum, the YWCA, and the Central Islamic Organization of Guyana. The Institute directly addresses social conflict and lobbies for legislative reform. It seeks to address public issues on their own terms rather than filtering them through racial-economic-political filters.

Civil society organizations have begun to demonstrate a heightened level of advocacy; however, the government does not welcome this civil society role. One government spokesman told the assessment team, "NGOs? We slaughter them. They confuse the issues in decision-making. We don't have productive discourse with NGOs. [They have] very impressive but infantile advocacy." There is a common perception among

government officials and party leaders that civil society is categorically tainted by political affiliation – a stand-in for the opposition. This perception is evident in the phrasing of public statements such as “so-called civil society,” a comment attributed to the PNC/R party leader.

The government has not fulfilled certain stated commitments to civil society. The CARICOM charter calls for each member state to appoint a national committee and to engage in parliamentary debate on the role of civil society. The government has not yet done so.

Civil Society, Race, and Politics

Party politics and ethnic polarization have an insidious effect on the functioning of civil society organizations. One informant said, “Political interference within civil society has weakened civil society.” Another stated, “Political problems at the top prevent local action and restrain potential.” Leaders of civil society organizations report that they must remain constantly on the alert against the intrusion of politics. Civil society organizations are continuously subject to external perception of party bias even when it is not present. PNC/R spokesmen have stated that civil society exists in name only: “If you appeal to civil society, you appeal to highly politicized institutions acting as fronts for the government.”

Internally, the specter of politico-racial politics also tends to emerge from within civil society organizations unless directly addressed. Leaders of several civil society organizations encountered by this team have reported a need for eternal vigilance on this issue. For example, such emergent divisions threatened to split the Georgetown Bar Association. Political differences had long split the country’s 100 or so mosques into two distinct camps until the Islamic Organization actively integrated most mosques into a single apolitical organization.

In the wake of 1994 elections, a non-partisan micro-enterprise project operated by the Rotary Club was forced to close. The benefiting community voted PPP/C, but party activists perceived the Rotary Club as PNC/R – a judgement derived from the skin color of Rotary members, according to one participant. The participant noted that it didn’t affect him personally since he was perceived as “color neutral,” i.e., non-partisan.

Another key informant reported the recent experience of a woman’s network that sponsored a workshop on business management principles. Women came from a great distance to participate, and the workshop enjoyed enormous success. Following the workshop, the group’s president received a phone call from the Regional Council Chairman who was very angry. He said the women’s group should have sought his permission, accused the group of working for the other party, and insisted he was to be personally involved in planning future training, including review of training material.

Clearly, the challenge of civil society activism goes beyond issues of party politics and the politics of race. It also confronts the need to expand civil society space in terms of top-down patterns of authoritarian control.

Finally, the team observed a finely tuned discussion by the New Amsterdam Action Group (NAAG) regarding the politics of garbage pickup. NAAG sought to develop a detailed strategy on how to proceed in a non-partisan way to build partnerships with the municipal government and community groups while avoiding even the hint of any perception of political or ethnic bias.

A number of informants for this study felt that civil society has a special role to play in a context of political polarization – a buffer between rival political forces. In the run up to national elections in 2001, some disagreements were reportedly resolved with the help of civil society involvement. Another informant was asked to serve on a government committee as a representative of minority groups in society. The man refused saying “... government committees don’t work; civil society does work.”

Civil society appears to have potential for promoting alternative dispute resolution and community-based conflict resolution in this highly litigious society fraught with conflict at both local and national levels. The UN Association has established numerous peace councils in Guyana. It might be useful to take a closer look at specific, practical applications of these peace councils and other efforts to promote alternative conflict resolution and examine whether peace councils effectively mediated local disputes.

Private Sector Organizations

The private sector is a special case within civil society. While there has always been a private sector, the sector changed with the opening created by the Hoyt government in 1988, leading to expansion of the private sector and phased reduction of state control over the economy. The state had at one time controlled 80 percent of the national economy. One representative of the private sector noted that there is no real tradition of partnership between the government and private sector in Guyana. He further noted a tendency for the private sector to bash the government and for the government to look with disdain on the profit motive. Overall, the private sector has tended to fear government and government has tended to distrust the private sector.

Private sector organizations include the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana and the Guyana Manufacturers Association. The Private Sector Commission is an umbrella organization of 30 private sector organizations, an outgrowth of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, and largely represents big business interests of Georgetown. Recently the Association of Regional Chambers of Commerce (ARCC) has emerged as a private sector voice advocating the interests of some 440 regional businesses employing several thousand workers. At present the ARCC appears to be one of the most effective of civil society organizations in terms of advocacy skills, sense of mission, internal organization, and potential impact. Assisted by the USAID/Guyana GEO project, ARCC

and the local interaction between ARCC and community groups may serve as a model for future programming that links DG and EG activities in Guyana.

Labor

Colonial labor practices had the effect of creating a racial-ethnic division of labor – both occupationally and geographically. The British abolished slavery in 1838 and subsequently brought in large numbers of indentured servants to work on rice and sugar plantations, recruiting in significant numbers from India, China, and the Madeira Islands. The use of indentured servants ended in 1917.

Trade unions reflect these divisions; occupational differences largely correlate with race. Historically, these differences tended to prevent integration and sometimes aroused racial hostility. There is an old tradition of worker riots, as in the Angel-Gabriel riots of 1856, inter-racial strife in 1889, and Ruimveldt riots of 1905. On the other hand, cross cutting issues also brought workers together in the labor struggles of the early 20th century.

The first trade union was established in 1917.⁶ Unions played a major political role in the anti-colonial movement of the 1960s and the nationalization of foreign companies in the 1970s. After 1986 they were affected by the transition from government control over the economy to a free-market economy and subsequent growth in the private sector. To some extent, labor unions are still in transition to civil society – having long been identified with state sectors of the economy.

Unions are largely public sector with close ties to the major political parties. Since 1992, unions with long-standing ties to the former ruling party have been marginalized under the current ruling party. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is the largest umbrella organization and a traditional base of support for the PNC/R. The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) represents sugar workers, is largely Indo-Guyanese, and supports the PPP/C. In 1988 the GAWU led a bloc of seven unions out of the TUC in protest against the ruling party (PNC) and formed a competing federation.

Party polarization has strongly defined the political role of trade unions, including the politics of race. Union spokesmen state that the TUC was “silenced,” and it ceased to benefit from government subventions in 2001. Membership in the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), a TUC member, is largely Afro-Guyanese and supportive of the PNC/R. GPSU spokespersons feel that the PPP/C government actively seeks to undercut and eventually to break the union. The GPSU is also stymied by what its spokesmen view as politically influenced breakdown of due process and the rule of law in resolving labor disputes. Many disputes result at present from the non-existence of the Public Service Commission that normally has the power to appoint and dismiss public officers.

Since a strike in 2000, GPSU membership has dropped from 12,000 to 5,000. The union’s general secretary, Indo-Guyanese, reports that he and the GPSU have been

⁶ See Jagan (1997, 291) especially Chapter XIV, “Race, Class, Colour, and Religion,” (pages 288-304) and Walter Rodney (1981), *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*.

victimized by politico-racial references, e.g., castigating him as leader of a “black people’s union.” On the other hand, GPSU spokespersons feel that the government actively promotes the GAWU, whose president is a PPP/C member of parliament. The rice industry presently benefits from a tax break that therefore favors rice workers and their union. One informant stated, “Rice farmers not paying taxes is a cultural issue,” indicating political favoritism in a context where rice farmers are largely Indo-Guyanese. In short, trade unionism in Guyana is a microcosm of the political system.

Union representatives encountered in this assessment would welcome assistance in the realm of conflict mediation. They also seek partners in promoting enhanced roles for civil society, protection of human rights, international labor standards, and an economic and political climate conducive to development.

Other Interest Groups

The USAID program has targeted civil society support for Amerindians, youth, and women’s organizations. Amerindian groups include the Amerindian People’s Association, the Guyana Organization of Indigenous Peoples, and Amerindian Touchaus Councils. Conservation International works with Amerindian villages around issues of resource protection as does the Iwokrama project affiliated with the University of Guyana.

There are a growing number of women’s organizations, and NDI has worked with organizations in this area. Training and strengthening of women’s groups have the potential for long-term impact by injecting new actors into civil society and governance roles. Political parties have sponsored women’s organizations, but there also are many non-partisan women’s groups. Women’s organizations include the following (illustrative):

- National Congress of Women
- Women’s Millennium Caucus
- Guyana Association of Woman Lawyers
- Rural Women’s Network
- Helping Hand Women’s Group
- Helping Hand affiliates such as the Rupununi Natural Cashew Enterprise
- Red Thread Association
- Women across Differences
- Women in Black

Youth organizations include the following (illustrative):

- Youth-n-Development
- University of Guyana Students’ Society
- Muslim Youth League
- University of Guyana Hindu Society
- Muslim Youth Organization

Guybernet
Janus Young Writers Guild
Youth Corps

NGO service providers include, but are not limited to, the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, NGO Forum, and the Peace Education Institute. The Institute of Private Enterprise Development is a private sector NGO that provides credit to micro-entrepreneurs. The Guyana Volunteer Consultancy is a non-profit NGO service provider that has worked with over 200 community-based organizations. International NGOs include such organizations as Conservation International and the UN Association of Guyana.

Professional associations include lawyers, social workers, doctors, nurses, and public administration. The membership of service clubs such as the Lions Club and Rotary Club includes business and professional people. In some instances, these organizations have provided leadership and resources for community organization and advocacy. The Lions Club plays a key role in the New Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce which in turn is active in the NAAG described above. There are specialized trade organizations in some sectors, e.g., tourism, small businesses, manufacturers, rice growers, and fishermen.

Local Action

Civil society organizations are highly variable. Many have internal organizational weaknesses and require institutional strengthening. The NGO Forum brought together a network of 60 NGOs to promote capacity building, advocacy, and citizen participation. It sponsored candidate forums in the period leading up to 2001 elections; however, at the time of fieldwork for this study, the Forum itself had not met for the past six months "...because of our weakness for organization," according to one member. Discussion with a Forum leader indicated that the organization did not have a sufficiently defined mission and needed to take stock of its generally moribund situation.

The difficulty in describing or organizing civil society is its sheer range and variation in size, structure, and degree of institutional permanence. It covers a broad range of interests. There appears to be a genuine opening at present to organize locally around specific issues – as in the positive experience thus far of the NDI assisted New Amsterdam Action Group. The local government reform process still underway retains space for civic groups and independent candidates to organize around local elections and therefore local issues, including the possibility of new local governmental structures (village and community councils). In past local elections, civic candidates have sometimes been surrogates for political parties, but this need not be the case.

Aside from local elections, it is evident from discussion with NDI women trainees, who are all potential candidates for local office, that there is an emerging base of experience in organizing around concrete local issues without regard to race or politics. Women enthusiastically report organizing voluntary, self-help neighborhood groups that clear garbage; weed roadways; clean drainage canals; and fundraise for street lights; minor

“patchwork” bridge repair; and telephone networks for purposes of neighborhood watch at times of unrest and local insecurity.

In one Georgetown neighborhood, the city Council stopped cleaning canals after 1994 local elections; since then, one citizen said, “boys and girls and gents get into the trench; we do it ourselves as far as practicable.” Some neighborhoods have community development councils that take an interest in NDC programs and budgets. One woman reported she had participated in a community police group in Buxton since 1997, patrolling the streets at all hours of the day and night during periods of unrest “...aiding the police, helping at the police station, keeping them cool.” When the issue of ethnic relations came up, another woman stated: “In our area we work side-by-side; at elections we go to vote together at 5 o’clock.”

In sum, there is an unquestionable social basis for local action, and opportunity for more active civil society participation in local governance. Assistance in this area should of course emphasize strategies and organizations not defined by race or political party affiliation.

Section IV Assessment Protocol Variables – Summary Analysis of Current Democracy and Governance Challenges

The use of the five democracy assessment protocol variables allows a more systematic look at the Guyanese political actors and institutions present in Sections II and III above. The variables are not discrete categories; issues that appear in one often reappear in another. The team has tried to reduce repetition, but some bleeding between variables is useful when describing political reality. In fact, some degree of overlap serves to highlight issues of particular significance. Secondly, overlap captures the interdependent character of the various components of democracy in both theory and practice, thus providing a holistic view.

After examining the variables independently, we discuss their relationship and put forth judgments about first-order challenges to democratic consolidation in Guyana. Finally, analysis of each variable reveals strengths and weaknesses that suggest strategy recommendations. The most successful DG strategies take note of system weaknesses but build on strengths and opportunities that can ensure a positive impact on the democratic process.

Consensus

Consensus is basic agreement on the scope and content of the political arena. The essence of democracy is *ordered competition*. Consensus issues address the space or terrain of politics as well as the basic rules of competition. State boundaries, issues of autonomy, and rights of citizenship are first-order concerns.

Guyana has near universal consensus in this regard. By and large, the legitimacy of the state is recognized; however, some population segments inhabit remote border areas adjoining Suriname, Venezuela, and Brazil. The Guyanese state has little or no presence in these areas, and there is uncontrolled population movement across these borders. There has also been a long-standing border dispute with Venezuela.

For issues relating to citizenship, the proper role of the state, the shape and content of democratic institutions, and public security, Guyana has significant problems of consensus among important political actors. This lack of consensus acts as a constraint on democratic practice. Guyanese citizens clearly aspire to democracy. Most state and market institutions reflect democratic intent. Internationally sanctioned free and fair elections, freedom of speech, free trade, and continued privatization of the economy are all in evidence. Citizens are generally free to pursue their interests. Although most major players in the political class embrace the outer forms of democracy, the shape and content of that democracy is subject to intense controversy.

Guyana is still in transition from a centrally controlled economy to a more open economic system and free trade. These changes have been accompanied by conflicting expectations regarding the role of the state as provider of jobs, goods, and services, and the role of citizens in civil society. The absence of consensus is compounded by a conflation of state, government and ruling party. This generates antagonism between the ruling party and the political opposition, civil society, and the media. To a large extent the roles of these sectors are ill defined in relation to the state. Societal expectations are inconsistent regarding how, when, and where citizens should participate in the political process. This confusion generates an atmosphere of unmitigated tension and contention as evidenced by the extended period of unrest that has so deeply marked Guyana since the national elections of 1997.

The absence of a social compact for ordered disagreement encourages recourse to extra-parliamentary means of redress. The latter directly threatens political, social, and economic stability. Disagreements are politicized; compromise is viewed as the surrender of rights or the erosion of legitimacy to govern. Civil society is perceived as a threat and intrusion to the political directorate because political parties insist that the only real criterion for legitimacy is a voting constituency. Under these circumstances, the role of civil society is circumscribed, and public debate over development issues is stifled.

There is a high level of dissension within the political elite. This is reflected in the indefinite 'pause' of inter-party dialogue. The dialogue has proved to be the single most meaningful mechanism for promoting consensus among the major political actors over the past year. Suspension of dialogue was precipitated by disagreement on composition of Parliamentary Oversight Committees. The intransigence of parliamentary and party leaders severely compromises the judiciary, police, and the public service. Commissions responsible for appointments, monitoring, and investigation are unable to function. Establishment of the constitutionally mandated Parliamentary Management Committee and Ethnic Relations Commission is also stymied.

The government and main opposition PNC/R must agree on the composition and leadership of parliamentary committees. The PNC/R is seeking committee chairmanships, arguing that effective checks and balances preclude the naming of sector ministers or other government officials from the chairmanship of parliamentary committees. The government is unwilling to concede to the opposition, noting the risk of parliamentary gridlock. The very absence of consensus on the role of parliament has in fact already created gridlock, stripping parliament of any active role in governance.

The recently concluded constitution reform provides significant mechanisms for achieving consensus; however, striking ambiguities remain unresolved, creating ample fodder for ongoing disagreement. In this regard, the reform process is incomplete. The quest for ethnic security and political inclusion should remain at the top of Guyana's democratization agenda.

Currently, the Local Government Task Force is considering the modalities of the local government elections and reforms. At the level of municipalities, regions, and rural

neighborhoods there is strong aspiration for meaningful decentralization; however, there is no strong evidence of the high-level political will required to enable heightened grassroots participation and efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services.

Consistent with notions of democratic centralism, there exists an over-concentration of power at the center of both political parties; this pervades the public bureaucracy and parliament. As a corollary, there is a systematic lack of consultation and filtering up of ideas from the base. Consequently, changes emanating from the center will likely be incremental at best. There is a high risk that new policies will reinforce party control at local levels. If local actors are to have greater voice and input, this will require continuous pressure and advocacy to allow greater room for local decision-making and local initiative. In short, effective decentralization of government will be a long-term process of transition rather than a legislative moment in time.

Consensus Future Strategy Considerations

In view of this analysis, it is imperative that targeted interventions promote greater citizen participation at the local level while engaging decision-makers at the highest levels of government. It is notoriously difficult to devise program activities that directly confront problems of consensus. High-level diplomatic pressures and conditionalities may be useful, including strategies that facilitate face-saving compromise. At lower levels, a proven strategy for consensus is a practical problem-solving focus on specific, locally shared concerns.

Rule of Law

Rule of law refers to the will and ability of a nation to enforce the rules of the political game. There may be consensus about the rules of the game, but without timely and consistent enforcement through judges, courts, statutes, lawyers, police, and informal means, there is no rule of law.

Rule of law in Guyana is very much a mixed bag. There is widespread rhetorical support for the institutions of justice and their vital function in a democratic society. One informant asserted, "...the concept of democracy in this country is very strong because we've inherited British common law and Western concepts of polity. In Guyana people believe in basic fairness and the rule of law." Despite an often anemic civil society, some of the most active CSOs are actively engaged in rule of law issues, e.g., the Bar Association, the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers, and the Guyana Human Rights Association. However, there are many symptoms indicating that the rule of law is distressed. No less than the highest-ranking legal officer in Guyana, the Honorable Madame Justice Desiree Bernard, recently said in a widely reported public speech, "It cannot be disputed that the administration of justice in Guyana is in trouble" (2002, 1).

The foundation of rule of law in any state is the constitution and the statutes that inform, uphold, and operationalize constitutional principles. As noted earlier, there is an absence of consensus on the constitutional foundation of the rule of law. The most obvious and

compelling example is the ambiguous and contradictory role of the Inter-Party Dialogue (IPD).

The Dialogue was established to provide a way forward in the wake of 2001 elections and give voice to PNC/R concerns that they had been shut out of the consultation process. The IPD was to bring closure to the constitutional reform process and then, presumably, end. Instead, while it has served to cool tensions in the short run, it now seems to function as a quasi-permanent institution despite the ‘pause,’ and in effect supplants the role of parliament as a site for compromise and oversight. If the pause is lifted and a functioning parliament emerges, the IPD will have served a valiant purpose. If it continues to drag out endlessly without a legal/constitutional basis, it could become an impediment to long-range establishment of the rule of law. Alternatively of course, the IPD could be rationalized and become an enshrined constitutional entity itself. This would entail the definition of a set of competencies, rational relationships between other governing institutions, and proper oversight. This seems unlikely at this juncture because none of the players appears concerned about the ambiguous legal status of the Inter-Party Dialogue.

Issues of human rights are important in Guyana. Extra-judicial killings by law enforcement have long been an issue in Guyana (Guyana Human Rights Association, 2000/2001, 2). Yet what in some settings would be a straightforward issue of human rights abuse, police overreaching, or lack of training, in Guyana takes on a political tone. Today, the PNC/R feels it is victimized in a process of political revenge and is critical of ‘rogue forces’ in the police service; however, prior to 1992, the PPP/C articulated the notion that police under the PNC/R government were targeting PPP supporters for political reasons.

Currently a media battle is raging between the PPP/C and the PNC/R. The PPP/C charges that the PNC/R supports criminals and “terroristic” tactics. The PNC/R responds that the police are politically motivated, as purportedly evidenced in at least one recent police slaying. A crime spree allegedly carried out by prison escapees escalated tensions; rumors are rampant that the crime spree was politically motivated. Most observers agree that the police are loyal to the PPP/C government despite Afro-Guyanese numerical dominance in the police force.

Many informants indicated that Guyana is extremely litigious but there seems to be a twist. Because of very inefficient courts and long delays, the courts are often used by those who do *not* want issues resolved and who benefit from the status quo. Not only is this an abuse of the purpose of the legal system, it also gives rise to opportunities for corruption. Some cases are dismissed or remain on the books indefinitely due to tactics of delay, mismanagement of court documents, frequent adjournments, and unavailable witnesses. In some instances the accused languish in prison awaiting trial for years. Some legal NGOs have recently worked with the DPP to raise the issue of habeas corpus and have been successful in winning releases of prisoners against whom the state has no case. As one might suspect, political advantage has been sought by labeling these activities as criminal friendly.

Charges of political interference in the courts are also made, though adamantly denied by high-level actors in the justice system. Citizens in general seem to assume that the courts are not politically neutral. This is not necessarily based on overwhelming evidence, but may instead be a function of the tendency noted earlier – conflation of the state, the party, and the government. Nonetheless, many of the team’s interlocutors affirmed the belief that courts are guided by political considerations extending beyond simple questions of justice.

Corruption and mismanagement at the Magistrate level is a problem recognized by the justice system as well as other interested observers (Bar Association, defense lawyers, donors in the justice sector, etc). This is attributed to low pay, poor work conditions, and poor quality training for Magistrates.

In the area of civil courts, some respondents indicate that contracts can be virtually unenforceable and that most small and medium size businesspeople use informal networks rather than formal contracts to guarantee predictable access to capital, resources, and services. For example, attempts by USAID SO 1 to encourage the creation and adoption of an investment code were short-circuited because of resistance on the part of economic players who felt they would be disadvantaged by clearer legal mechanisms. This seems to be symptomatic of Guyanese political life. Instead of debating the policy and identifying reasonable compromises, the investment code was vitiated by a political end run and appeal to high-level party figures. The result was an empty code without the force of law, and its adoption now appears unlikely.

There are indications that the roles of narco-trafficking and local drug use are both on the rise. Some observers note that a host of factors make Guyana an ideal spot for drug transshipments. Relaxed banking laws provide a means for money laundering. Loose frontiers offer places for safe passage. Low-paid and poorly trained police make detection unlikely or bribery inexpensive. An inefficient justice sector means that with skilled lawyers, prosecution can be avoided indefinitely. Without rigorous forensic or evidentiary processes, investigations will bog down or guilty verdicts will be difficult to obtain. These factors combined with proximity to major drug production areas and narcotic trafficking vectors to North America and Europe make Guyana potentially very attractive to drug smugglers. There is no need for political complicity in a setting so hospitable to narco-trafficking by virtue of malfunction in governance and the rule of law. If politicians were to enter the fray, the mix of racial politics, drug money, and high-powered weapons would be a frightening development making the Mashramani Day jail break and its aftermath look like a day at the park.

Chancellor Bernard has identified an “ever-increasing backlog of cases” as the chief symptom of the troubles in the justice sector. According to her, primary causes of backlog include:

- Shortage of judicial personnel at High Court and Magistrate Courts
- A fourfold increase in litigation over the past 10 years

Results of the backlog include long delays in resolving civil matters and large percentages of remand⁷ prisoners in the prison population (*Ibid.*, 4). The long delays entail high costs including increased transaction costs born by commercial agents – costs that are passed on to consumers, lost opportunities for economic growth as companies choose to expand in more hospitable legal climates, and human rights abuses experienced by unjustly held prisoners. The result is a marked decline in public confidence that justice can be served through the courts.

Rule of Law Future Strategy Considerations

Rule of law has been a central focus of the two previous DG strategies in Guyana. In spite of many obvious needs, the challenges of working in close proximity to the center of political power in Guyana have led to lower levels of impact than anticipated (Olsen 1997 and UWI/USAID/Guyana Undated). The assessment team anticipates that a reorientation in assistance to rule of law may be needed. This could focus on the legal components and legal reforms needed to assure productive decentralization and increasingly effective local level administration. A generic engagement with the justice sector should be avoided and strategic choices about where likely impact will be most efficient will need to be made.

Competition

Free and open competition for power based on popular sovereignty is perhaps the defining element of democracy. Free and fair elections are critical, but other closely related realms of competition encompass checks and balances within government – democratic decentralization, economic competition, public space for pluralism, an active civil society, and competition for ideas, including free media and freedom of expression. How is Guyana faring in this regard? Is there presently room for competition in these sectors?

In formal terms, the Guyanese political system allows open competition for public office and a multiplicity of political parties. A total of eight parties competed in national elections of March 2001. Despite relentless polarization that weighs heavy on Guyanese politics, Guyana has demonstrated progress in planning and carrying out elections deemed free and fair, at least in technical terms, by neutral observers. The elections of 1992 constituted a watershed – the first elections in 28 years generally accepted as honest. Local government elections in 1994 were the first local elections since 1970. The opposition party rejected the results of 1997 elections, a dispute that remained unresolved for three years until the courts vitiated elections. There was high turnout for March 2001 elections, which were deemed acceptable by international standards. The 2001 elections were hotly protested in the streets, but the opposition eventually accepted the election results.

⁷ Remand is the status of a prisoner prior to trial who has either been denied bail or is unable to afford bail. The Director of Prison Services reports that 42% of the prison population in Guyana are on remand.

In short, the last decade has seen an opening up of the political system, including free and fair elections, a reduced number of appointed parliamentarians, improved gender balance in parliament, and the establishment of the Guyana Elections Commission as a permanent institution. These are undoubtedly important steps forward in routinizing the electoral cycle and widening the field of competition. Nevertheless, election results continue to be fraught with controversy and unrest.

Electoral seasons are characteristically marked by violence and significantly heightened racial tensions. These patterns do not bode well for institutionalizing the electoral process on the basis of publicly accepted norms and behaviors that express popular sovereignty. Progress in formalizing the process has not been matched by social consensus and acceptance of the results of elections. Despite the participation of minority parties, the vast majority of votes are captured by the two major parties whose voting base is defined overwhelmingly by the two major ethnic voting blocs.

Members of the Guyana Elections Commission are drawn primarily from the two major parties rather than neutral elements of civil society. Only one minority party is directly represented on the Commission. Thus, Commission membership does not reflect the full spectrum of parties represented in parliament. The Commission also runs the risk of obsolescence over time since the party spectrum may change. The commission is well balanced between the two major parties, but retains the specter of duopoly control.

Despite formalized measures to assure competition in the electoral system, free elections have not assured a flowering of democracy in Guyana. While there are formal checks and balances, the system continues to be dominated by the powerful executive branch and by the upper echelon of the governing party. Old patterns of 'democratic centralism' dominate a weak parliamentary system. At present the parliament doesn't meet often. It is crippled by internal crisis stemming from inter-party intransigence over control of Standing Committees. The judicial branch is somewhat more independent as a branch of government but remains overshadowed by the strong executive and severely challenged by judicial vacancies, a non-functioning Judicial Service Commission, and a backlog of cases. Although it retains a measure of legal autonomy, the judiciary is financially dependent.

In essence, despite the outer forms of a republic and parliamentary forms of government, the inner reality is one of centralized power concentrated in the executive branch and the ruling party. The apparatus of state and the ruling government are virtually indistinguishable – all under the aegis of a small inner circle of ruling party leaders.

There have been some efforts to reform the system of government. Parliament established the Constitutional Reform Commission in 1999 and a bipartisan Local Government Task Force in the wake of 2001 elections. Last year the president and the leader of the opposition began inter-party dialogue on other important policy issues, including land distribution and titling, borders and security, broadcast media legislation, industry and bauxite resuscitation, depressed communities, and establishment of a commission on race and ethnic relations.

Local elections have not been held since 1994. A calendar for new local elections – to be carried out in the wake of local government reform legislation – continues to be delayed. High-level government spokespersons suggest that decentralization of government may be “inevitable” in the long term, if only because it is potentially a tool for assuring near-term electoral success and long-term party control. On the other hand, there appears to be little political will for decentralization or genuine devolution of power. Despite evidence from interviews that the bipartisan Task Force has continued to meet, the government’s spokesman states that local elections are doubtful this year because of the opposition’s current stance of “active non-cooperation.”⁸

Overall, some have described the reigning political culture is barren ground for democratic decentralization. Despite certain openings in the system since 1992, there is a “disorganized flowering of democracy. Individuals can speak, individual rights are recognized, democracy reigns, and everyone is a politician.” The top down system, however, remains firmly in place under the control of the ruling party. There is no particular evidence from recent interviews that this situation would differ appreciably if the main opposition party returned to power. The superstructure of both major parties is dominated by old patterns of ‘democratic centralism.’ There is virtually no political culture of accommodation and compromise. There is no tradition of a loyal opposition joining forces with the ruling party to assure the nuts and bolts of governance.

Free media are indispensable for the free flow of information, competition for ideas, and a pluralistic civil society. Guyana enjoys basic freedoms of the press, but there are generally low standards of journalistic practice. Broadcast media, especially television, plays an important role. At present there are five broadcast news shows that air on a regular basis. There are reportedly 17 to 23 television stations in Guyana, some of which broadcast only intermittently. There is fairly open entry and exit into the television market. On the other hand, government radio exercises a virtual monopoly and reflects the government line. Local media specialists deem television broadcasts to be far more influential than radio.

Media observers and monitors note that print and broadcast media are commonly mouthpieces for political parties. Working for the state media translates to support for the ruling party. News reporting tends to fall into two camps – government or opposition. Reporting also tends to be colored by the politics of ethnicity. Investigative journalism is lacking and there is relatively little airing of public policy issues.

There has recently been some initiative to confront media problems and the role of media in society and governance. Prior to 2001 elections, over 40 media owners and practitioners met under the sponsorship of the Guyana Elections Commission and the Canadian International Development Agency. These practitioners developed a Media Code of Conduct to “to contribute to a fair, peaceful and well regulated election and avoidance of the aggravation of ethnic tension and unnecessary political discord” (Myers

⁸ The Chronicle, Thursday, April 25, 2002, page 1, “PNC/R stand threatens Local Government elections – Luncheon.”

et al, 2001, 4). In the wake of the 2001 elections, the government established an Advisory Committee on Broadcasting. Its purpose is to facilitate structured development of television broadcasting, including norms and ethical standards, and it anticipates formal creation of a government Broadcasting Authority.

Subsequent to the March 2001 elections, the report of the Media Monitoring Unit concluded that the media were largely unsuccessful in adhering to the Media Code. According to this report, media elections coverage was oriented largely to the views of political parties rather than serving as an independent forum to explore and report on issues raised by the campaign. Coverage emphasized the two major parties, although the print media provided more coverage of minority parties than did the broadcast media. Television newscasts focused extensively on government. Television talk shows in some cases served to incite public disturbances and generally “revealed an incredible disregard for the MCC [Media Code of Conduct] and the stability of the nation” (*Ibid.*, 113).

Guyana has a mixed economy. In some sectors it remains in transition from a state-controlled command economy to private enterprise, although privatization objectives are scheduled for completion by 2002. Guyana has always had a free market sector, and there is presently free entry and exit and continuing opportunity for market competition. There are old patterns of antagonism between the state apparatus and the private sector. On the other hand, there is a commonly stated perception that government procurement tends to favor private sector friends of the party or the government. Private sector interests don’t appear to be well reflected in the operations and policies of major political parties.

Unions are traditionally linked to public employment and parastatal enterprises and have a history of partisan affiliation. The Private Sector Commission is centered on Georgetown and oriented to big business. It does not represent other important elements of the economy including manufacturing, small and medium enterprises, and regional business interests. Regional Chambers of Commerce have recently shown significant membership growth and organized a national network. Regional Chambers have actively engaged in advocacy on a broad range of issues. This has not surprisingly created some friction in relations with government. Regional Chambers of Commerce are exercising a growing role as civil society organizations interested in local and regional governance.

Other important advocacy roles in civil society have been exercised by the bar association in Georgetown, the Association of Women Lawyers, and the Human Rights Association. Inter-religious organizations have taken important initiatives that join together Christian, Muslim, and Hindu organizations in socially beneficial ways including conflict mediation and peaceful co-existence among ethnic groups.

In many respects, civil society tends to be fragmented and poorly organized. The place of non-governmental organizations in civil society is not clearly defined and generally not welcomed by the government, although there is some change in this regard in the past few years. Non-governmental organizations are commonly resource poor and lacking basic infrastructure to serve their members or constituencies.

There is also evidence that non-governmental organizations are more active now than in the 1980s. This suggests greater room for maneuver for civil society, especially since 1992. Nevertheless, there are restrictions in practice. The government tends to view civil society organizations as not being representative, evidenced by the common refrain: “Who elected them?” The watchdog role of civil society is viewed as suspect and partisan. Civil society is tolerated so long as it is not perceived as a threat to party or government. Civil society groups advocating for issues may be viewed as suspect or politically partisan rather than simple policy advocates or legitimate means of interest articulation for citizens. Civil society is generally perceived as oppositional rather than as potential partners in governance

Competition Future Strategy Considerations

The pilot NDI initiative to assist civil society organization around specific issues of local governance in New Amsterdam has great promise. There is evidence that youth and women’s groups have the potential to play growing roles in local governance. Private sector organizations such as Chambers of Commerce appear to be a useful channel for civil society participation in local governance.

In general, democracy issues of competition and pluralism could be addressed in future Mission programs by focusing on local government reform. This could include media and journalism, local elections, local and regional civil society strengthening, local private sector concerns, and carefully targeted institutions in central government such as commissions of local government and ethnic relations and perhaps the Ministry of Local Government.

Inclusion

A critical hallmark of democracy is inclusion. Formal institutions and informal practice should support the rights of all citizens to participate in both governmental and non-governmental arenas. Democratic forms of government should guarantee individual political and individual rights and the inclusion of all population segments of society. Are there formal guarantees of citizen rights in Guyana? Are social segments excluded formally or informally from access to meaningful participation in political, social or economic spheres?

The politics of race and exclusion have deeply marked the Guyanese political system for at least the past 50 years. For historical and economic reasons, Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese ethnicity coincides loosely with rural versus urban residence, contrasting patterns of livelihood, and cultural differences. The two major political parties are by and large ethnically based – the defining element of a longstanding, strategy to capture votes and win elections by playing the race card. Consequently, party politics in general, and elections in particular, invariably rip and shred the very fabric of Guyanese society – explicitly playing on stereotypes, old fears of deprivation, victimization, and ethnic

insecurity. One informant stated, “We have passed from British Guiana through Burnham Guyana to Bitter Guyana.”

Due to the power of stereotypes, physical appearance may have the effect of assigning one a political party label. The team noted a common saying: “Here in Guyana we are separated by the texture of our hair and the color of our skin.” The party in power seeks to monopolize all power, e.g., either you’re with me or against me. Therefore, acute political polarization drives wedges between racial-ethnic groups as well as parties, and discourages democratic pluralism including the emergence of effective minority parties.

The fundamental issue is not race but the political use of race – now virtually institutionalized in the two-party system that dominates Guyanese politics. It is a problem rooted in authoritarian political leadership rather than pressures from the electoral base. There is a curious air of unreality in Guyanese racial politics. Most informants interviewed in the present study have taken note of the seriousness of the racial-political problem in Guyana. Some have expressed baldly racist views. Most have reported good personal relations across ethnic lines both socially and in the workplace. People from Buxton have also reported protecting their neighbors across ethnic lines in times of unrest and political violence. Oddly, top party leaders of the governing party explicitly deny the racial orientation of their party, though the reality of racial politics is obvious to all. It seems clear that Guyanese society and political leaders have never directly addressed the problem.

These politics of race are not the only problem of exclusion in Guyana. Most people are concentrated in coastal areas on about 5 percent of the land area. In contrast to the coastal region, the sparsely populated interior is considerably less well served by government services and infrastructure. Amerindians compose an estimated 9 percent of the population, according to some informants, in contrast to an estimated 47 percent Indo-Guyanese and 43 percent Afro-Guyanese.⁹ Amerindians occupy low social and economic status in Guyanese society and live mostly in the sparsely populated interior, including a changing frontier and movement back and forth across national borders. In many cases Amerindians don’t have access to privately owned land. The Guyana Action Party (GAP) has a base of support among Amerindians and others in the interior, and GAP/WPA has one seat in parliament. GAP is widely perceived as an Amerindian party.

Authoritarian patterns of central government and party leadership also tend to exclude ordinary citizens from participation in governance. Party control in parliament tends to obviate the need for consultation or broader participation. Sub-national governments exercise relatively little autonomy, i.e., Regional and Neighborhood Development Councils and Municipal Councils. Proposed constitutional reforms would have the effect of strengthening local government but have not yet resulted in formal

⁹ These are population estimates reported by informants. Another estimate suggests that 48 percent of the population of 770,100 is Indo-Guyanese, 33 percent Afro-Guyanese, and other ethnic groups 19 percent. There are no current census data, and published estimates vary immensely. There is some evidence that out-migration among Indo-Guyanese is somewhat higher than among Afro-Guyanese, this may have the impact of increasing the relation proportion of Afro-Guyanese.

decentralization or devolution of central government power and resources. The electoral system based on party lists deters accountability to local voters. Implementation of recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Local Government would move this process along in favor of greater local participation, i.e., inclusion.

Constitutional reforms also provide for the creation of a series of commissions that support inclusion among social sectors subject to discrimination. Aside from the Ethnic Relations Commission, they also include special attention to other significant social sectors that tend to be excluded, especially women and Amerindians. Prescribed commissions, not yet created, that directly address issues of exclusion include the following:

- The Ethnic Relations Commission
- The Human Rights Commission
- The Women and Gender Equity Commission
- The Indigenous Peoples Commission
- The Rights of the Child Commission

Inclusion Future Strategy Considerations

Program areas with the potential for alleviating problems of exclusion include focus on issues of local governance and practical local concerns that cut across ethnic differences. It is also important to continue some support for implementation of constitutional reforms and a continuing reform process. For a variety of reasons, it would be useful to provide assistance for the establishment of commissions noted above.

Good Governance

Issues of good governance are intertwined with all four previous assessment variables. In the most immediate sense, good governance refers to efficiency and openness. In broader terms, the impact of the other variables is fully evident in the area of governance. In a democracy, good governance is ‘where the rubber meets the road’ – effective delivery of basic public goods that citizens can reasonably expect from a democratic state. Public goods include the following:

- Public safety
- Law and order
- Functioning justice
- Basic infrastructure
- Social services
- Instruments and policies for economic growth
- Appropriate, moral, and feasible re-distributive mechanisms

Effective government service delivery is clearly related to transparent and accountable management practices, but prior to accountability, we should look first at capacity issues.

At an analytical level, good governance is normally a dependant variable – a result of copasetic circumstances in the realm of consensus, rule of law, competition, and inclusion. If there are severe problems of good governance, it is often a symptom of problems in one or more of the other variables. From this perspective, Guyana is something of an anomaly. In spite of serious problems at the level of consensus and inclusion, there is a range of sectors where governance capacity (while arguably decreasing over time) has remained at a remarkably high level.

For example, Guyana has a massive public works infrastructure that has been maintained and improved since independence. The DNI system of seawalls, canals, pumps, and sluices all require high levels of maintenance and are functioning by and large as intended. The same may be said for telephone, electricity, and road networks. These areas of infrastructure all have problems typical to developing nations, such as black outs, saturated phone lines, and roads in need of repair and upkeep, but they all function. While popular experience emphasizes the frequency of black outs in Georgetown, the reality is that they are much less frequent than in many nations at equal levels of economic development.

In the area of the economy, in spite of periodic setbacks and considerable sector inefficiency, Guyana maintains a largely industrialized and modernizing agriculture, forestry, and mining sector. These points illustrate the potential of government to create or maintain capacity in areas of special focus and high priority. To the extent that problems of governance exist in Guyana, it undoubtedly reflects shortcomings within other democracy framework variables, but governance problems also result simply from low priority on the part of the state, and the absence of political will.

As noted earlier, due to Guyana's past experiences with a state-planned economy, citizens have very high expectations for the functioning of the state. "People drop a piece of garbage, not because they do not care about the environment, but because in their mind, it is the job of the city to keep the streets clean," said one interlocutor. Citizens also commonly expect the state to provide jobs and control prices that affect the cost of living.

Party Politics, the Blame Game, and Good Governance

At the level of national governance, there are a number of areas where good governance falls apart. Further, it seems plausible to link failures of governance to political troubles identified in all of the previous variables. The assessment team heard reports of inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and mismanagement in a broad range of public functions, including tendering, contracting, investment code drafting, case management in the courts, deeds registrar, magistrate courts, traffic police, local government rates collection, and rates assessments, to name only a few. In a healthy democratic setting, there would be a host of institutions and civil society-based watchdog groups that could expose such inefficiencies; however, in the present political climate, pointing out that extra judicial killing is a problem translates to sympathy for criminals or is labeled "terroristic."

Meanwhile, civil society is devalued and marginalized such that an independent voice on these issues cannot be articulated. Citizen advocacy groups are few. Those that speak out are suspect and accused of partisanship. The flip side of the dilemma is that opposition party figures use PPP/C missteps (large or small) to mercilessly pillory the government. Because the political arena is so full of invective, it is often difficult to tell legitimate concerns from nitpicking. Overall, a focus on policy issues, efficiency of implementation, and good governance gets lost in the political morass of party grandstanding.

Governance and Brain Drain

Governance clearly suffers from Guyana's brain drain. Given the statistical levels of poverty, it is intriguing to note that Guyana has a very high rate of literacy, which is estimated at 96 percent, much higher than many much wealthier nations. Some have estimated that the Guyanese diaspora is equivalent in numbers to the entire population of Guyana at home.

It is difficult to recruit staff for high-level positions in Guyana when many of the best and the brightest are attracted to public and private sector positions throughout the Caribbean and North America. Interlocutors spoke of high-level and experienced judges who have migrated to other Caribbean nations to head Supreme Courts. The youth of Guyana are characteristically bright and enthusiastic, but do not have the depth of skills or experience it takes to staff government agencies. Thus, some ministries operate with skeletal staff able to cover only the most basic tasks required of them. This has reportedly been the case at the Ministry of Local Government – all the more distressing in the recent past since a great deal of analytical work was required to work on local government reform.

The flip side of the brain drain is return remittances. It is clear that overseas remittances currently play a critical role in Guyana's economy. The assessment team encountered return migrants who are investing in the economy, such as the accountant from St. Martin investing in the fishing industry in Berbice. In many respects, the climate for investment leaves much to be desired; however, overseas Guyanese represent an important resource for reinvestment in Guyana. It would be useful to continue donor efforts to improve the investment climate and reduce onerous bureaucratic requirements.

In view of growing human resource deficits and the limited levels of new investment in Guyana, the country needs a coherent strategy to harness the energies and investment powers of the growing numbers and growing affluence of the diaspora. The assessment team also met a Guyanese US university professor who had relocated to Guyana after retirement and was working as a high level administrator at a regional campus of UG. Many similar cases are reported and many thousands more are reported ready to return if stability and good governance were firmly established. Donors might consider support for fundraising campaigns among overseas Guyanese, funds that could be used for development efforts as well as private sector investment in Guyana.

Good Governance Future Strategy Considerations

This assessment's main strategy recommendations emerge out of a focus on good governance. These recommendations draw on both problems and opportunities identified in the analysis of other assessment variables.

The team views local government and local level citizen participation as clearly the most promising, and perhaps the only logical point of entrée, given Guyana's current political situation. A new culture of democracy may emerge out of local government capacity building, and promotion of the ability of local citizens to interact positively and consistently on issues. In the long term, empowered and efficient local communities can have an impact on the top-down parties. More vocal and engaged local communities could maneuver for political openings and advocate for reforms that donors have been unsuccessful in creating. The recommended strategy depends on energy, excitement, and commitment from below and places maximal confidence in the Guyanese people.

Section V Donor Environment and USAID Comparative Advantages

Current Donor Activities and Future Plans

The donor community in Guyana has cooperated in many ways around the areas relevant to DG. In particular, support for GECOM and other election-related expenses have been coordinated in a cooperative manner. There are a number of other relevant activities and some ongoing planning that should inform USAID/Guyana strategy decisions in the near and medium terms. In keeping with the PRSP, most donors are presently showing an interest in support for local governance.

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

The IDB is currently the largest donor in the country and deeply involved in capacity building at the level of RDCs and Municipal Governments. In this area, the IDB has focused on technical assistance and training for financial management, planning, and the development of own-source revenue for local governments (IDB 1998). The IDB has also provided significant levels of support to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development including technical assistance for reform of municipal by-laws and clarification of local/national and regional lines of authority in municipalities.

The IDB funds a strong project implementation unit that carries out training and could serve as a useful source of information and experience in the AID design phase of a proposed local government activity. The IDB does not work at the NDC level and has only marginal expertise and experience in the areas of advocacy, citizen participation, and governance issues. Linking USAID activities as a complement to IDB programming could help fund local level officials able to articulate clear and convincing development agendas, and promote civil society partnership in local governance.

World Bank

The World Bank is currently undergoing a strategic planning process in the area of local government support. A Washington-based Guyanese national heads up the local government planning unit and has particular interest in the evolution of Bank activities in Guyana. There may be areas for synergy available as the outline of proposed projects become clearer.

Guyana has completed the PRSP process and HIPIC funds should soon be available. The PRSP identifies local government and local level political participation as a key priority for Guyana. This should provide an important tool for USAID in negotiations of a new strategic objective agreement with the Government of Guyana.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP is the lead agency for local donor coordination around democracy and governance.

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

According to the CIDA Guyana representative, the agency supports capacity building and technical issues in governance. Its major effort is the Guyana Economic Management Program (GEMP), a program to revise and update government financial management. This effort may have increased significance due to heightened donor expectations regarding accountability, including the PRSP and debt relief money. The IMF/WB would normally exercise this role, but will not seek to duplicate GEMP – now going into its third phase of funding. It has completed its planning and training phase and now turns to practical nuts and bolts of managing government. The IMF is pressuring the Government of Guyana to give these efforts priority.

CIDA has provided support for elections and expects to provide some additional support to GECOM once they have presented a strategic plan. In this general area, CIDA has also provided small levels of support to other small-scale initiatives such as a conference on national reconciliation sponsored by the Guyana Trade Union Congress.

CIDA supports the new advisory committee on broadcasting on condition that the government will follow up with national broadcasting legislation. CIDA would ultimately be willing to provide additional support for a national broadcasting authority, including training. Other CIDA projects include strengthening specific government bodies, such as Guyana Basic Education Training (GBET) which does teacher training for hinterland schools, and Guyana Environmental Capacity Development (GENCAPD), which assists the Guyana Geology and Mining Commission.

CIDA support outside of the government includes Building Community Capacity Project (BCCP) targeting capacity building for NGOs, including stakeholder analysis and strategic thinking; and some support for community peace councils via the Guyana Human Rights Association and the UN Association of Guyana. This includes training in conflict resolution with a network of 20 peace councils focused on basic mediation for family squabbles and small businesses. CIDA has also met with a donor workgroup on civil society.

Projects currently in the planning phase include Ministry of Health capacity building, which is focused on health surveillance, a project scheduled to begin in 2002; and early childhood education outside the formal education system, e.g., private nursery schools in conjunction with UNICEF. CIDA is planning support for local government capacity building in six municipalities and some of the regions via its advertised Guyana Municipal Governance and Management Project.

CIDA is presently revising its country strategy. The new strategy will have three pillars: private sector development, governance and democracy, and social development. The current strategy was limited to private sector and governance/democracy. In terms of

local donor coordination, CIDA takes the lead in private sector support. DFID provides support for the Private Sector Commission, AID for regional Chambers of Commerce, and CIDA for the Guyana Manufacturing Association.

Department for International Development (DFID)

According to the agency representative, DFID has been working in Guyana since 1992 and operates out of its Barbados regional office. The agency has an interest in public sector reform including water, land survey, and forestry. DFID works jointly with the British High Commission. Support for police reform is funded partly through the British Foreign Office and partly through DFID. British support for the judiciary includes safety, security, and access to justice sector. There may be some forthcoming support for the penal system. The DFID representative has noted that the agency presently uses a practical, opportunistic approach, responding to needs as they come up, and needs to develop an overall strategy for its Guyana program.

Other Donors

Other donors encountered include the European Union (EU) and the InterAmerican Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA). IICA activities include assistance to women's groups in rural areas. The EU provides assistance for infrastructure, including housing and the seawall, some budgetary support and technical assistance for government management (governance), some assistance in the health sector, and elections support, such as observers. The EU is insisting on long-range strategic planning as a condition of assistance. It is also insisting on greater attention to civil society, unions, and the private sector including micro-credit. The EU also manages a small projects fund.

USAID Comparative Advantages – Leveraging Unique Strengths

Past and Current DG Strategy – Taking Advantage of Previous Investments

USAID has developed a wealth of contacts and experience over the period of the current strategy. USAID presently has a high profile among GOG actors due to its support for elections, judicial reform, and candidate. It also reports slow and sometimes sporadic implementation of activities. This is largely a function of GOG delays, e.g., USAID continues to await appointment of a case management tracking specialist in keeping with GOG commitments since 1998. Political impediments are also a factor.

In the past, USAID has engaged implementing partners who did not prove to be as efficient and capable as hoped (UWI/USAID/Guyana. Undated). These issues are more pertinent at the level of activity design. They are noted here to suggest the importance of process and the effects of using particular engagement mechanisms in any new strategy considerations.

USAID as an agency has a strong background in the area of local governance capacity building and promotion of participation of community organizations at local levels.

There are projects with similar objectives across the globe and a growing consensus on the lessons learned and best practices in this area. Useful models may be derived from USAID projects in Uganda, Ghana, Mali, Haiti, El Salvador, Bulgaria and others. (Include paragraph that articulates the relevant lessons to be taken and how they could apply to the Guyana situation).

Synergy with other SOs – EGSO, HIV/AIDS SpSO

USAID/Guyana EGSO has developed into an important contributor to progress in the area of governance reform. This is particularly so in current work with regional chambers of commerce. Establishment of the Association of Regional Chambers of Commerce has revitalized these private sector actors and contributed directly to increased civic activity. (New Amsterdam Action Group) Future strategy development in both the EG and DG sectors should take careful note of this success and search for ways to facilitate the sustainability of Action Groups and to seed the idea in other localities.

NGOs devoted to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment are potential partners for advocacy training and engagement with local government officials. They may bring a sense of enthusiasm and youthful energy to coalitions of citizen groups, and they can mobilize larger numbers of young people to engage in productive and democratic lobbying of the state. The DG SO should seek for ways to enable and utilize these groups to promote good governance and democratic attitudes along with their HIV/AIDS sector concerns.

Women's organizations are useful allies and important targets for assistance. They have shown themselves to be increasingly visible, have developed a growing reputation for neutrality, and have proven themselves to be articulate on behalf of a particularly oppressed group in Guyana.

Section VI Strategic Recommendations

Given the current DG status of Guyana as articulated in Sections I-IV above, the resources likely to be available to the Mission in the next strategy period, the donor environment, and USAID's comparative advantages as discussed in Section V, the assessment team recommends the following:

A strategic focus on local governance reform, local governance capacity building, and citizen participation in local governance.

All other USAID/Guyana/DG activities should be related in concrete and easily articulated ways to this constellation of core activities. This will provide optimal impact, promote a focused set of activities, and send a clear and consistent message in concert with other donors to the GOG. In a country marked by political manipulation and brinksmanship, the power structure will undoubtedly attempt to soften the impact of devolution of power and resist local government empowerment. Thus, the Mission must seek a high level of commitment and a high degree of consistency between the country team as a whole and other donors.

Critical Assumptions

- Local governance reform efforts at the level of the joint committee are 'un-paused' to allow for the preparation and carrying out of local government elections.
- Local government elections occur by the time of or shortly after the start of the new strategy (October 2003).
- Local government reforms do not completely install party politics downward to the smallest levels of governance.
- Resources available for DG activities remain stable or grow modestly over the period of the strategic plan.
- The political costs of shifting focus can be borne successfully to allow the negotiation of a largely local-focused SOAG with the GOG.

General Strategic Focus on Local Governance Capacity Building and Citizen Participation

The collective judgment of the assessment team is that problems of consensus and inclusion are pervasive and of a primary order in Guyana. There is little common ground in Guyanese politics because each party feels insecure. For the PPP/C, the insecurities stem from (1) fear that the Afro-Guyanese population will pursue methods of street

protest and resistance that often result in property damage and injuries or death to Indo-Guyanese; (2) a defensiveness about relatively modest PPP/C achievements after nearly a decade in power.

For the PNC/R, the insecurity results from a feeling of disinherited power and an increasing fear of economic marginalization. After having governed in heavy-handed fashion for so long, it is difficult to recognize the limits of power implicit in being a political opposition. This in turn leads to unrealistic demands directed at government and a tendency to over-react to the least perceived slight. In these circumstances the political discourse and political practice is rife with invective and innuendo, blame, and backward looking reasoning. Shared concerns about particular issues and interests are blocked by short-term electoral calculations. Any possible accomplishment on the part of the PPP/C is either blocked or belittled by the PNC/R. Even legitimate concerns or standard practices of political oversight and balance of power are denounced by the PPP/C as “extra-constitutional” and nefarious in intent.

The ongoing political stalemate suggests little hope of lasting solutions because none of the major political actors has any real incentive to press for fundamental institutional changes. The stalled constitutional reform process offers only modest hope in this regard – even if the parties were able to extricate themselves from the high-octane rhetoric and political blame that blocks future compromise. On the whole, the national level political arena is not a hospitable place for donor support in democracy and governance. Past activities under the DG SO have produced only modest accomplishments when focused primarily at the national level, such as electoral systems, parliament, and justice improvement. Recent success in the local governance pilot in New Amsterdam may indicate a way forward.

To bypass national level political pathologies and provide a counter balance to ethnic politics at the national level, the assessment team recommends a broad strategic focus on local governance and citizen participation at the local level. To the extent that national level support is provided, it should be focused primarily on issues of direct and immediate importance to local government reform and local government capacity building. Alternatively it should contribute in a direct way to local level citizen participation in the policy making and implementing process.

The team also recognizes a need for the Mission to remain engaged at the national level and recommends allocating sufficient resources to that end; however, the team notes that this shift in strategy will also mean a significant reduction in programming at the national level. This refined strategy focus offers a host of potential benefits:

- It takes advantage of what promises to be a new beginning for local government institutions with the first elections since 1994 anticipated for early 2003.
- It dovetails directly with large levels of support soon available from World Bank and IDB for local government entities to undertake infrastructure improvement, institutional strengthening, and increased ability to deliver services. Thus it promises to add efficiencies to multi-lateral programs.

- It engages citizens directly and should boost confidence in democracy's capacity to respond and deliver.
- It builds habits of political cooperation and compromise at the local level that can serve as a counterbalance to the pathologies of political racialization practiced at the center.
- It builds on USAID successes in pilot programs such as the current activities with the New Amsterdam Action Group and the Municipal Government of New Amsterdam, and EG success in promoting regional Chambers of Commerce.

In the long term, this may offer the only means of breaking the cycle of ethnic recrimination that serves the interests of two major parties but not the people of Guyana as a nation.

Illustrative Specific Program Elements

Consensus

Since a high level of dissensus exists among the major stakeholders, the Mission should remain engaged with leaders at the national level to improve the general DG environment. The Mission should also encourage compromise and accommodation between the government, the ruling PPP/C, and the PNC/R without excluding other minority parties. Mission programs should carefully maintain a primary focus on local governance capacity building and local citizen participation efforts and engage national actors in ways that have direct relevance to local governance.

- Properly functioning political parties are key to an effective pluralist democracy; however, party rivalries are presently a significant source of disagreement in Guyana. Working with political parties at the national level is not likely to be accepted or to yield significant results in the present political environment. Prospective local government officials, most likely party members, represent immediate opportunities for training in a range of subjects, including the role, duties and daily work of a counselor, relations with the local community, and taxation systems. Training program can range from workshops, short courses, retreats, seeding of ideas, and study tours. At the national level, a cross-party retreat of promising young party leaders, which could be aimed at understanding and playing a leading role in effective local governance reform, may serve as a carrot to induce acceptance of what otherwise could be perceived as meddling.
- Many minority groups in society are denied the opportunity to have their voice heard or to fulfill their potential. This is particularly true for women. The Mission should expand and strengthen programs that encourage participation and the inclusion of women in the decision-making process. All opportunities for training should ensure gender balance where it is practicable to do so.
- The intractable nature of Guyanese ethnic-politics points to the need for alternative conflict resolution mechanisms. The duly constituted Ethnic Relation

Commission may represent a target for modest levels of technical support. Support for peace education and peace councils, in collaboration with the UNAG, should complement traditional decision-making activities of the courts and the legislature. The project could productively include incoming visits of elder statesmen and public fora for face-to-face interaction.

Rule of Law

Rule of law has been a centerpiece of USAID activities in Guyana. Due to local constraints, investments have not resulted in the high levels of impact. In spite of obvious ongoing needs, the team recommends a thorough reconsideration of support in this area. A strategic narrowing of strategy should emphasize rule of law issues most relevant to local governance capacity building and participation of local citizens in the local governance process.

- A large amount of new legislation is anticipated in the wake of the February 2001 constitutional amendment laying out the local government reform process (Constitution {Amendment} {No 2} Act 2001, Articles 72 – 78). Much if not all of that work should be completed well before the next USAID strategy takes effect. Nonetheless, USAID/Guyana would be advised to anticipate the strategy and lay groundwork for it by continuing support to the statutory process and to the Joint Task Force on Local Government Reform.
 - In particular USAID should take every opportunity to underline and support a full and meaningful implementation of the constitution's Articles 74 {3} and 75, which read:

Article 74 {3}: It shall be the duty of local democratic organs to maintain and protect public property, improve working and living conditions, promote the social and cultural life of the people, raise the level of civic consciousness, preserve law and order, consolidate the rule of law and safeguard the rights of citizens.

Article 75: Parliament shall provide that local democratic organs shall be autonomous and take decisions which are binding upon their agencies and institutions, and upon the communities and citizens of their areas.

- The legal relationships between local governance organs and the proposed Local Government Commission are murky at best. Further, the role of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in relation to the new Commission must be clearly established. USAID may well consider technical assistance and TA to help clarify and rationalize the legal status of these entities with an eye to promoting maximum autonomy at the local level.
- The newly elected organs of local governance will be charged with a greater role in law and order and rule of law than is currently the case. While the scope of this

change is yet to be determined, staff and elected officials will need training and knowledge about a host of issues that they have previously not been asked to consider. As part of an overall training and TA package (recommended under *Good Governance* below), there should be modules to develop competencies that would allow effective policy making, oversight of law and order, and rule of law functions.

- Mechanisms for local alternative dispute resolution (community-based and local government-based) could be an important instrument to prevent local policy makers from adding to case backlogs.
- USAID should continue periodic institutional support for the Bar Association, Association of Women lawyers, and Legal Aid, particularly in their efforts to conduct outreach to local areas. Targeted at local citizen participation as well as local governance officials, this should take the form of assistance for publications, public education, citizenship training, popular legal training, *and* legal or constitutional training. Substantive focus should be on LG reforms, local governance functions, and the legal role of citizen organizations.
 - In addition to the Bar, Legal Aid, and women lawyers, USAID should identify and support other local NGOs in the diffusion of information on LG reforms.

Competition

- One priority of GECOM is the compilation of a National Rolling Register. The registration function may need to be decentralized to existing local government offices such as the RDC. The Mission may be well placed to provide modest support but not to create independent regional registration offices.
- Support for the independent media is one component of USAID's objective to promote the development of democratic practices and institutions. Other donors have provided crucial financial support on the regulation of the broadcast media and the implementation of adequate legislation. Other unattended problems include poor journalistic standards and editorial mismanagement. The Mission is well placed to provide journalistic training for responsible investigative reporting on issues rather than simply reporting on events that exacerbate tensions in the society. Such training should include talk show hosts who have been some of the worst offenders in inciting unrest. The focus of training should be coverage and analysis of constitutional reforms relating to local governance, establishment of local government 'beats,' and helping reporters become more knowledgeable about these issues.
- The team recommends civic education programs and media campaigns that explain the nature of Local Government reform and the role of civil society. This

should include media and civic education to promote particular policy agendas of local communities.

- The duly constituted Local Government Commission (when formed) will complement reforms and prospects envisaged here for local governance. The Mission should provide support to the Commission in the form of technical assistance and training with a view to enhancing the enabling environment for all local government officials.
- The role of civil society can be improved by strengthening group partners in local governance. The New Amsterdam Action Group serves as a pilot project for action oriented, non-partisan partnerships with local government. Support should be proactive in nature: The Mission should specifically promote multiple issue-focused partnerships that straddle both race and party politics.
- The Mission should build on its success in facilitating private sector collaboration at local and regional levels, especially with small- and medium-sized businesses. This offers the advantage of being an important cross-sectoral linkage for DG and EG SOs.

Inclusion

- The cause of inclusive governance would be served by ongoing program support for constitutional reform. This could take the form of support for an ongoing reform process as well as implementation of local government reforms already agreed, including:
 - establishment of the Local Government Commission,
 - further efforts toward democratic decentralization,
 - modes of representation that ensure accountability to citizens and local communities (constituency based representation)
- Program support should be made available for civil society engagement with the Ethnic Relations Commission and other parliamentary commissions focused on inclusion, including human rights and gender equity.
- Program support should facilitate actions that focus on practical local concerns cutting across ethnic differences.
- Some program effort should directly address problems of ethnic insecurity via forums, workshops, media campaigns, and collaborative efforts, especially at local levels.

Good Governance

Points highlighted above lend support to good governance, including issues of legislative reforms, consolidation of good parliamentary procedures, and support for civil society groups as partners in more democratic governance.

- A full featured, in-depth capacity building program should enhance efficiency and accountability in local government institutions. The more tactical elements of the programs should address strategic planning, budgeting, accounting procedures, consultation, community participation, bureaucratic survival, taxation, and legal education.
- The Mission should prioritize actions that enhance the governing capacity of what is likely to be a very high proportion of new-intake RDC and NDC councilors. This might include strategic efforts in the area of Information Technologies, provision of computer equipment, operational handbooks, networks, etc.

Appendix A Individuals and Groups Consulted

NAME	INSTITUTION/TITLE
Carol Becker	USAID/Guyana
Charles Cutshall	USAID/Guyana
Claudia Becker	NDI - Senior Program Assistant LAC
Michael Murphy	NDI – Country Director
Deborah M. Ullmer	NDI – Director of Development
Matt Dippell	NDI – Deputy Director LAC
Pablo O. Galarce	IFES – Program Officer The Americas
Ronald Godard	US Embassy Guyana – Ambassador
Gorden Studebaker	GEO MSI-Chemonics, Private Sector Advisor
Tom Whitney	GEO Chemonics, Project Director
DONORS	
Richard B. Olver	UNDP, Resident Representative
Lawrence Lachmansingh	UNDP Program Analyst (Governance)
Trevor Booth	IDB
Judith Wiley	IDB/Canada Consult
Ovid Walton	IDB/Canada Consult
Alexis M. Gardella	Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture/Country Representative
Keith W. McLean	World Bank / Decentralization, Community Driven Development / Guyana Program
Murray Kam	CIDA - Country Director
Greg Briffa	DFID
Helena Laakso	First Secretary, Economic Advisor European Union, Guyana
MEDIA	
Sharief Khan	Editor in Chief, Guyana Chronicle
Visham Ramsaywack	GTV – Editor in Chief
Anthony J. Vieira	Vieira Communications Ltd.-
Dr. Patrick Dial	Broadcast Advisory Committee
Christopher A. Nascimento	Public Communications Consultants Limited
Eve Blackman	NBTV - Channel 9
Enrico Woolford	Executive Producer, Capitol News (TV)
LABOR UNIONS	
Patrick Yarde	President -of Guyana Public Service Union
Norris Witter	Guyana Trades Union Congress – VP
Surendra Persaud	GPSU - General Secretary
Randolph Kirton	GPSU – Legal Advisor
Leslie Melville	Consultant – GPSU
ELECTIONS COMMISSION	
Dr R. P..Surubally	Chairman
Gocool Boodoo	Chief Election Officer
Calvin Benn	Deputy Chief Election Officer
Vishnu Prasad	Public Relations Officer

PRIVATE SECTOR	
Dr. Leslie Chin	Institute of Private Enterprise Development/ NGO Forum
Gerry Gouveia	Private Sector Commission
JUSTICE SECTOR	
Roxanne George	Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions
Madame Justice Desiree Bernard	Judiciary - Chancellor
Chief Justice Carl Singh	Judiciary – Chief Justice
NGOs	
Major General Joseph Singh	Executive Director Conservation International
Josephine Whitehead	Legal Aid
Anande Trotman	Guyana Bar Association –President
Mike McCormack	Guyana Human Rights Association - President
David Yhann	NGO Forum
Bibi Rehana Alli	NDI – Women’s Local Government Training
Mimoon Boodhoo	NDI – Women’s Local Government Training
Deborah Pyle Critchlow	NDI – Women’s Local Government Training
Genevieve Allen	NDI – Women’s Local Government Training
Florence Bourne	NDI – Women’s Local Government Training
The New Amsterdam Steering/Action Group	Approximately 25 participants
RELIGIOUS GROUPS	
Bishop Juan Edghill	Guyana Council of Churches
Mujtaba A. Nasir	Central Islamic Organization of Guyana
Kerry Arthur	Central Islamic Organization of Guyana
GOVERNMENT	
Dr. Roger Luncheon	Office of the President
Samuel A.A. Hinds	Prime Minister
Doodnauth Singh	Attorney General
Ralph Ramkarran	Speaker of the House
Coby Frimpong	PRSP Coordinator
Clinton Collymore	Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Government
Reepu Daman Persaud	Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
OPPOSITION and 3rd Party	
Michael E. Scott	Director – Graduate Studies, University of Guyana (former Political Affairs Officer – Office of President, for both PNC presidents)
Rashleigh Jackson	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Burnham and Hoyt
Rishee Thakur	Professor of Public Administration, University of Guyana, (Berbice Campus)
Vincent Alexander	Co-chair Local Government Task Force
Oscar Clarke	PNC/R – General Secretary
Lance Carberry	PNC/R - Chief Whip
Jerome Khan	PNC/R – MP/ Businessman
Ravi Dev	ROAR – MP and Party Leader
Sheila Holder	GAP/WPA – MP

OTHER	
Donald Ramotar	PPP/C – General Secretary
Rudy Collins	Foreign Ministry
Kumkarran Ramdass	Regional Democratic Councillor – Region 6
Roy Amrith Baijnauth	Corriverton Town Council - Mayor
Chris S. K. Persaud	Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce/ Magistrate
Haripersaud Beharry	Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce/ RDC Councilor- ROAR
David Subnauth	Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce/
Ramesh Ganga	Ordinance/Fort Lands No.38 NDC - VC
Godfrey Evans	Ordinance/Fort Lands No.38 NDC - VC
Cecil Hari Kission	Ordinance/Fort Lands No.38 NDC - VC
Laurel S.P. Alfred	New Amsterdam Town Council – Town Clerk
Mandram Persaud	Chairman Canje NDC #38
Chetram Narsiah	Typist, Canje NDC #38
Paulette Henry	Lecturer, UG
Ramesh Maraj	Berbice Chamber of Commerce - President
Winston Cramer	NDI

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